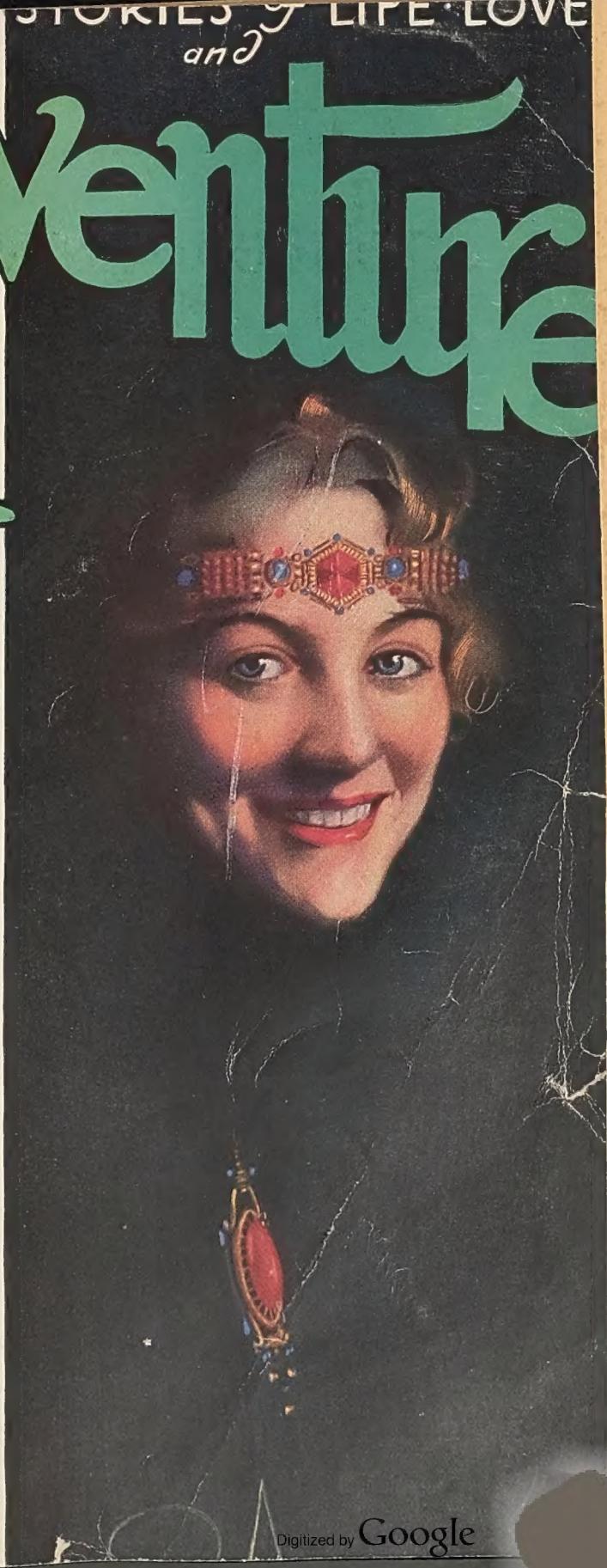
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
FEB 1 1943
THE LIBRARY

STORIES of LIFE · LOVE and

Adventure



The WINDS of the WORLD

A stirring tale of India at the outbreak of this war, and of YASMINI, the entrancing

by

TALBOT MUNDY

The Red Law

A Complete Novel of the West, by

JACKSON GREGORY

JULY
15 CENTS

Digitized by Google

The Real Adventure

It is the most amazingly interesting novel you have read in years. She is charming, young, a college sophomore; he a distinguished lawyer. He wants her to have a career! *But what that career of hers did to him and their marriage!*

Henry Kitchell Webster

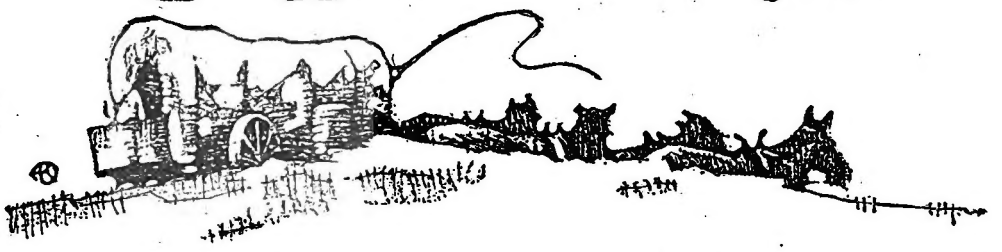
has written a love-story as modern as 1915, as full of sentiment as 1860. A marriage-story full of problems and yet full of humor. The characters are real—real and American. The action is spontaneous as life itself. Few stories you have ever read have been as well written, as well worth reading. Begin it in

Everybody's Magazine

for **JUNE**

Digitized by Google

Vol. 10 **Adventure** No. 3



Published by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY
ERMAN J. RIDGWAY, President — RAY BROWN, Secretary and Treasurer
Spring and Macdougal Sts. - - - New York City
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England
Entered at the New York Post-Office as Second-Class Matter
ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Managing Editor

Contents for July, 1915

Cover Design . . . . . **Rolf Armstrong**

The Red Law *A Complete Novel* . . . . . **Jackson Gregory** 3
This was the law of the unfenced West where the ranges met the Bad Country; "six-guns" were the judges and bronzed sons of the great outdoors the jury. The West could not be what it is today had there never lived men like *Babe Deveril* and *Stet Davis*—and women like *Marian Ellston*. For her, they would ride a day without water; so would others; so will you, once you catch her smile.

A Gamble in Geese *A Tale of Dawson Days* . . . . . **Samuel Alexander White** 60
A thousand geese, at twenty dollars a head, for Dawson's Christmas dinner! The scheme looks easy to *Sark* and *Bassett*. But they fail to reckon on *Casino Charley*, who has promised Dawson he will smash the Goose Trust.

The Coward . . . . . **W. Townend** 75
A man threw away his own honor for a girl—turned back from a sinking ship when he might have rescued all. But he faced the world, and the world judged; he returned to the girl, and she judged. Then he did what few men will do.

The Patch . . . . . **Hapsburg Liebe** 90
Steadfast as the everlasting hills is the heart of a mountaineer, and as enduring the love of a mountain maid. Born and raised among Tennessee crags, the writer knows and gives you both in this forceful tale of the "lonesome pine" country.

The Black Death *A Sir John Hawkwood Story* . . . . . **Marion Polk Angellotti** 95
And a plot of the same color. A story of Italy in the days of gleaming breastplates.

The Winds of the World *A Three-Part Story. Part I* . . . . **Talbot Mundy** 106
A tale of India during those stirring days that marked the opening of the present war; of an English Colonel who staked his honor on the integrity of his Sikh regiment; of Subahdar-Major *Ranjoor Singh*, to whom the fire of a charger and the smell of saddle-leather were life; and of *Yasmini*, "Sweet as a rose, and twice as tempting—with a poisoned thorn inside," to whom the "Winds" brought Government secrets from the men who rule the world.

(Continued on next page)

Digitized by Google

(Continued from preceding page)

On the Bamticook Trail . . . . . **Hugh Pendexter** 127
A man-hunt on the long white trail, and the clearing of a Northern mystery.

The Resurrection Peddler . . . . . **Clinton H. Stagg** 133
The citizens of Medford grew rich in an hour from the victims of a wreck. Then they waited patiently nineteen years for another. One morning *Gerald K. Simpson*, booster, claxoned into town and gave Medford twelve wrecks in a week—worth a hundred million apiece.

The Monks of St. Methodius . . . . . **Arthur D. Howden-Smith** 147
Commanding the gateway to Bulgaria, stood St. Methodius, grim, massive, formidable. War! Then came the Turks to seize this key. But the Brothers stood firm for Cross and Country.

Pearls and Perils . . . . . **A. Judson Hanna** 159
They go hand in hand when sought in the South Seas.

State o' Maine . . . . . **Charles Edward Daniell** 172
The Secret Service strikes even to the heart of the Everglades.

Contraband *A Holy Holly Story* . . . . . **Gordon McCreagh** 181
Holly stages an opium-smuggling picture on the river to Mandalay, and runs foul of the Excise Department. Whereupon the Red Squirrel registers joy.

The Man-Trail *A Four-Part Story. Conclusion* . . . . . **Henry Oyen** 192
The King Pines must be cut before the North Woods break from the grip of Winter, or *Jack Peabody* has failed. With dissension in his own ranks, with *Bull Bart* and the gang from Whisky Falls fighting every inch of progress, with man-killing weather forcing even lumberjacks to their knees, Jack drives his men to the attack.

The American Legion 213

The Camp-Fire **A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers** 214

Headings . . . . . **A. R. Bowker**

Turn to the Trail Ahead—Last Page

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of August 24, 1912, of *Adventure*, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1915. Editor, ERMAN J. RIDGWAY, 223 Spring Street, New York, N. Y. Managing Editor, ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, 223 Spring Street, New York, N. Y. Business Manager, JAMES F. BIRMINGHAM, 223 Spring Street, New York, N. Y. Publisher, THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. *Owners:* (If a corporation, give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders holding 1 per cent. or more of total amount of stock. If not a corporation, give names and addresses of individual owners.) *Owner:* THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. *Stockholders:* THE FEDERAL PUBLISHING COMPANY, a corporation, 15 Exchange Place, Jersey City, N. J. THE BUTTERICK COMPANY, a corporation, 223 Spring Street, New York, N. Y. THE BUTTERICK PUBLISHING COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York, N. Y. J. F. BIRMINGHAM, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. WM. H. BLACK, 152 West 91st Street, New York City, N.Y. MRS. THERESA R. CARROLL, 777 Madison Avenue, New York City, N.Y. EMILY JOSEPHINE DONNER, 23 Euclid Avenue, Summit, N. J. W. H. GELSHENEN, 100 William Street, New York City, N.Y. CLARA E. KEHOE, 2344 University Avenue, New York City, N. Y. H. F. MORSE, 3 West 46th Street, New York City, N. Y. LAURA J. O'LOUGHLIN, 156 Ridge Street, Glens Falls, N. Y. MRS. ARETHUSA POND, 955 West End Avenue, New York City, N. Y. ERMAN J. RIDGWAY, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. AUGUSTUS VAN WYCK, 149 Broadway, New York City, N. Y. R. A. VAN WYCK, 149 Broadway, New York City, N. Y. G. W. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. MARIE A. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. BEN F. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. *Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders, holding 1 per cent. or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities:* (*If there are none, so state.*) GEORGE W. WILDER, 329 W. 108th St. New York, N. Y. GERTRUDE C. WILDER, 329 W. 108th St., New York, N. Y. JULIA MARLOWE, Hotel Walton, Philadelphia, Pa. THE FEDERAL PUBLISHING COMPANY, 15 Exchange Place, Jersey City, N. J. JOHN ADAMS THAYER, 101 E. 80th St., New York, N. Y. JOHN O'HARA COSGRAVE, 128 W. 59th St., New York, N. Y. J. F. BIRMINGHAM, Business Manager. *Sworn to and subscribed before me this 29th day of March*, 1915. JAMES B. SHEEHAN, Notary Public. (*My commission expires March* 30th, 1916.) [Seal.]

Issued monthly. **Yearly Subscription, $1.50 in advance.** **Single copy, fifteen cents.**

Foreign postage, $1.00 additional. Canadian postage, 30 cents.

Trade-Mark Registered; Copyright, 1915, by The Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain.

The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

Digitized by Google

Adventure
Registered in the U.S. Patent Office
JULY
1915
Vol. 10
No. 3

THE RED LAW

A COMPLETE NOVEL

By Jackson Gregory

Author of "The Crimson Mask."

WESTEDEN was the town's name. Or, at least, if one sought upon a very large map at the proper place he might find in very small type the word, "Westeden." Such was the official designation bestowed many years ago when the village was in its swaddling clothes and without personality.

Since then, from the many personalities making this their home or headquarters, it had drawn a distinct entity, and before the green boards upon its scattered shacks had warped and cracked under the first year's sun, men more thoroughly qualified to judge than its optimistic founder had rechristened it.

Now it was variously known as Hang Town, Hell's Annex and Temlock's Cross Roads. And with the passing years it had won and championed its title to the hardest little town west of the Atlantic. Which is saying a good deal.

It was the way hereabouts to call into question the propriety of official acts, and a town had no better assurance than a man to keep the name to which he was born. And here, where all the world was in the melting-pot, it had no character to be reckoned its own until it had made one for itself. In fifteen years Westeden had grown from a beardless youth of a village into an out and out bad town. And it was proud of it and proud of its names. Most frequently was it called Hang Town.

Copyright 1915 by The Ridgway Company. All rights reserved

Digitized by Google

It was a sleepy village of one street, called Main Street as unblushingly as if there had been a dozen other thoroughfares. Main Street was half a mile long. It was crooked and dusty in Summer, crooked and muddy in Winter. There was a hotel, consisting chiefly of a barroom; there were three stores, with dry-goods and groceries in small rooms at the rear and long saloons in front; the post-office maintained its grave dignity between two saloons, like a man trying to look sober with a whisky-barrel on each side of him.

The census claimed fifteen hundred population, but then the census-taker had come into Hang Town one day when there were races on and a dance scheduled for the evening, and the boys had not told him the truth. Two days later he would have had extreme difficulty in finding five hundred, even if he had counted saddle-horses.

A sleepy village during the long Summer days, dozing quietly, its empty street and alleys as sluggish as the arteries of a napping old man; a town of lethargy and languor and empty stores and saloons very many days and nights of the year. But tonight Hang Town was awake, wide awake.

Perhaps it would not have a score of nights like this during the three hundred and sixty-five. Its eyes were open; its lights were on; it was in its holiday clothes.

Men rode this way and that up the long street, calling loudly to their fellows, seeking friends, thirsty perhaps from many days out on the alkali plains of the Bad Country, feverish for a game of draw or stud or a whirl at the wheel or an hour of bucking the tiger. Shod hoofs echoed noisily from the board sidewalks, as cow-ponies were spurred up to the swing-doors; spur chains and bridle chains jingled and chinked everywhere. And from the Hall, named as unblushingly as was Main Street, came the scraping of two fiddles, the thrum of guitar, the clamor of cornet and tinkle of piano, to explain the cause of the foregathering.

IT WAS still early; the musicians were just tuning up, the street was filled, the hall was filling. The lines of dusty, sweating saddle-horses at the hitching-rails lengthened and thickened; the clumping of boot-heels on the uneven sidewalk grew into a steady rumble as of distant thunder. Now and then from the cattle country lying to the eastward or from the Bad Country to the west, a cowboy, or half a dozen punchers together from some outfit, clattered into Main Street looking for an evening of frolic.

Naturally, the crowds swelled in the saloons, the jostling throng pouring from them as from eddying pools in an overflow to the Hall. And still, although the music had swung into a waltz and though men came and went, the boots were close together along the foot-rails, and the extra bartenders were as busy as their breed likes to be. In particular, was the Barrel House crowded.

There were in Hang Town, as in all communities where men have builded houses and called them their homes, two jarring factions. There were the men who openly stood for Temlock; there were those who refused to sanction the things he did. And since the Temlock faction was overwhelmingly the stronger, since the Barrel House was known to belong to Temlock, since it was by far the most pretentious saloon in the town, where the biggest games ran their unlimited, unlicensed, open way, it was here that most drinks were sold, most money won and lost.

Here in Hang Town, upon the flank of an unfenced cattle country on the one side, the natural gateway into the Bad Country of which men knew little and that little not good, men were not in the way of troubling about what other men did so long as they themselves were not personally effected. They were a part of a rough country wherein a man, if weak and inefficient, must go to the wall.

They were used to living life in the raw as it always pulses where locomotives and electric wires have not found their way; they were content to sit as judges upon their own interests and to look with unprejudiced eyes at the happenings just beyond the lines of their property or their lives.

They had not learned to put faith in law courts and the administrators of the written law. They were swift to act upon their own business; they were slow to step in where they were not concerned. And so, there were many men in town tonight who were not a declared element of either faction, cowboys who knew Temlock or of him, who were not blind to the things which he did, and yet who could not see that it was any of their business.

"He'll get the wrong man some day,"

Digitized by Google

was their way of thinking. And then there would be an end of the matter. In the meantime life ran merrily, the games were running, the bartenders were busy, the dance was "livenin' up."

In the Barrel House there was not a man who was not "heeled." Yet nowhere was there hint or sign of a gun. Men, for the most part, wore their coats tonight, there being a little chill in the air for one thing, a coat being an extreme evidence of "dressin' up" for another. And, for those who understand, it is an easy matter to carry a gun, heavy or small caliber as the wearer fancies, under his coat-tails, in his hip-pocket or—again a matter of taste and judgment—in the waistband of his trousers.

BEHIND the long bar, at the end nearest the snapping doors, was a man whom a stranger never failed to look at sharply, to look at again after his eyes had challenged and been challenged by the bartender's. The man, Henry Lehr, generally known as "Long Henery," was not the sort of man one expects to find behind a bar.

He was a very big man, so very tall that, towering high above the two other men aiding him in his labors tonight, one had the feeling that he stood on a box. He was always clean-shaven, and the long, heavy jawbone stood out distinctly under the tight-drawn, dead-white of his skin. He was almost bald, although a man of but thirty-five or six, and the forehead, high and broad, seemed an almost abnormally salient feature.

Despite the deadly pallor of the skin, there was no hint of unhealthiness about the man; his eyes, bright, keen, a little small, were like a snake's for brilliancy and alertness. His every gesture bespoke a great, swift, crushing strength. He was a man with a hard reputation, a hard face, a silent tongue. And it was Long Henery who looked after Temlock's interests here in town, who managed the Barrel House and safeguarded the intakings of the till and who, beyond the limits of his duties, attended very strictly to his own business.

Now Long Henery was smiling. He smiled often, laughed very seldom. He was mixing a drink for a newcomer to the saloon, a garrulous, nervous-mannered young fellow who punched cows for the Circle Ten, peddled gossip for the countryside and was known familiarly as "Windy" Bendish. As usual he was talking.

He had had three or four drinks at the Trail's End saloon, four or five at the hotel bar, and now had entered announcing joyously that he didn't give a —— for no —— man that didn't give a —— for him.

That was all very well and very good sagebrush philosophy, a very fine thing in its place. And yet it was nobody's business but Windy Bendish's, and it would have been far better for him if he had talked less that night.

Temlock was a man seen very rarely in Hang Town, seen rarely enough anywhere save by those few men whom he trusted —to a certain, small extent, and by whom he was watched, cursed and feared. For close to half a year now the village known to so many as Temlock's Cross Roads, had not caught sight of him or his lean-flanked, roan saddle-horse. And because of that, because, further, Temlock was something of a celebrity, it was at once to be judged safe and to be held spectacular for a man to speak as Windy Bendish was speaking. Like many a "little man" before him, he was trying to do something big.

"You ol' hoss thief, you!" he beamed jocularly into Long Henery's smiling face. "What's the word?"

A shaking of the head and a continuance of the smile answered him. Windy Bendish, aware that his entrance had been scarcely noticed, and yearning for something more than that, flung at the urbane bartender:

"I'm lookin' for a man name of Temlock! Know him?"

The smile remained; the shake of the head was changed to a brief nod. There was no curiosity in Long Henery's expression, no interest in his eyes, no question on his lips.

A few men to whom Bendish's voice carried above the noise of the room turned quickly at the mention of Temlock's name. At the nearest gaming-table, where a deft-fingered young man was dealing at draw-poker and being watched very closely by the half of a dozen men most strongly interested in the fall of the cards, four or five cowboys looking on shifted their eyes to the man at the bar.

They were of the Wagon-Wheel outfit, they had a name of traveling together, and they knew a great deal about Temlock. One of them made a low-voiced remark, the others laughed softly and they turned

Digitized by Google

away to watch the game when they saw that it was only Windy Bendish doing the talking.

"Yessir," went on Bendish, his glass poised on the trail to his lips. "I'm lookin' for a man name of Temlock. Cause why? Cause I've los' a mare better'n which there ain't none trottin' under saddle-leather, an' I know where to look for her! Cause of all the low-lived hoss-thieves as runs loose, there ain't a one crookeder than Temlock! I'm lookin' for him, an' when I find him——"

Any night but this night in the last six months it would have been safe enough for Windy Bendish to say what he pleased about Temlock. But fate is but a game of cards at which the man chiefly interested rarely enough deals. Bendish's glass had not yet gone its brief way to his lips when the door swung back against an impatient shoulder. He did not notice it, he did not see who it was that had come in. But other men did notice and they saw that the man entering had arrived just in time to hear his name spoken.

Long Henery's quick eyes went to the door, smiling, and came away, smiling. There was no change upon his face, no slightest expression of what he had seen or of what he was thinking. Perhaps he was not thinking at all; perhaps he was not sufficiently interested to remember and mark what he had seen.

But one of the men watching the poker game spoke softly; other men turned; the dealer paused in the middle of the deal; an instinctive uneasiness ran down the long barroom until all men turned toward Bendish and the door.

IT WAS a very big man who had entered. As tall as Long Henery, heavier, broader of shoulder, thicker of thigh, a man weighing something over two hundred pounds, and as light upon his booted feet as a cat. A great, wide, soft black hat was pushed far back upon his head, his eyes looked with a sort of stony indifference upon the man doing the talking; his lips were drawn back just a little so that the teeth showed. That was Temlock's way of smiling.

For just a moment it was very still in the long barroom. The circling ivory ball at the roulette table spun merrily, its low hum grown suddenly very distinct. Temlock had not spoken, did not speak now, as his eyes went their swift way up and down the room and came again to rest upon Bendish. Then he came a step nearer so that his great bulk no longer stood in the doorway, and a man who had stood just behind him came in with him and stood at his elbow.

This was a man known as widely as Temlock himself; Crag Verilees, a younger man, lean-flanked, clean-muscled, quick-eyed, handsome in a way that was not entirely pleasant, a man with a reputation as far-reaching and as hard as Temlock's. He, too, had heard Windy Bendish's boast and he, too, was smiling. And his smile was at once contemptuous and cruel.

Evidently, Bendish, who had not yet turned, felt gropingly that something was wrong. He looked curiously into Long Henery's inscrutable face, looked toward the table where the Wagon Wheel boys stood shoulder to shoulder, saw that their eyes had left him and gone steadily toward the door, and then he turned—turned swiftly. Perhaps some sixth sense had told him what it was.

Temlock was looking him straight between the eyes, Temlock's way. Temlock's brows were drawn a little, his eyes thoughtful. There was no emotion to be read in the hard face; no hint of anger. But he was thinking, and every man there understood that he must overlook what Bendish had been saying or he must answer it—in just one way.

The cruel eyes of Crag Verilees shifted to his companion's face; the lean, wolfish face of Crag Verilees darkened. He opened his mouth as if to speak and then closed it, saying nothing, shrugging his shoulders.

Almost upon the instant of his turning, Windy Bendish's eyes widened perceptibly, his jaw dropped, his face went a sickly white. The hand holding his glass shook. A little of the fiery liquor spilled upon the bar. He put the glass down noisily.

"So you're lookin' for me, are you, Bendish?" asked Temlock, his voice lingering over his slowly spoken words, a little frown, a little uncertainty still in his eyes. "Well, I'm here!"

At least he was not going to overlook what Bendish had said. Several men moved, stepping quietly out of the line of the two, a line which might be defined by a stream of hot lead in a moment. The Wagon Wheel men, their faces very grave, watched Temlock closely. He had made no move to go

Digitized by Google

for his gun; they did not believe that he had quite made up his mind whether or not he was going to kill Bendish.

Bendish had not answered. All of his garrulousness had gone in a second. The man was a coward, and he showed it in his shaking hand, his white face, his staring eyes. His lips moved. His throat made a little dry sound but no words came.

Crag Verilees laughed. His eyes, almost Oriental in their narrow, slanting length, glittered with his hard mirth.

"Come on, Temlock," he said carelessly. "Either go up an' slap the little rabbit or consider it's jus' the wind a-blowin' as usual an' forget it. I'm thirsty."

"Bendish," said Temlock, his drawl still marked, paying no heed to his friend, "you're just a pore little —— fool. What you say ain't worth listenin' to an' all the boys knows it. Nor you ain't worth a man's throwin' away good powder an' lead on. Now—" and his tone grew just a shade sharper—"you do what I tell you to, an' do it quick. Take up your glass an' drink it, bottoms up, to me. If I was a —— sight worse'n I am I'd be a better man than you ever was! Drink that!"

Bendish hesitated, looked anxiously into Temlock's stern eyes and from them to the expressionless faces of the men about him. Again he looked to Temlock; and then he put out a nervous hand, seized the glass and throwing back his head tossed the liquor off.

"That settles it," grunted Temlock. He followed Crag Verilees to the bar and slapped down a twenty-dollar gold-piece. "The house drinks on me, Henery," he said carelessly. "I ain't been to town for quite some time."

AND that would have settled it had Windy Bendish been a wiser man. But some one broke into a short laugh as Bendish drank the compulsory toast, and the laugh and perhaps the simultaneous effect of the brandy, whipped a flush into Bendish's pale face.

Temlock's back was half turned to him. Bendish moved swiftly, his hand flashing to his hip. Long Henery saw and dropped out of sight behind his bar; Crag Verilees saw and stepped a couple of feet to the side; Temlock saw, whirled, drew and fired before Bendish's gun had been raised.

And Bendish dropped, settled and lay still. A snarling, reverberating report, a little puff of smoke, an unerring bit of lead, and "Finis" was scrawled across the inefficient life of Windy Bendish.

His revolver had rattled to the floor and lay still; the smoke cleared, and Temlock swept the room with his quick eyes, watching for some man to take up Bendish's quarrel. Verilees stood leaning against the bar, the same cruel, contemptuous smile in his eyes as they, too, swept the room.

Long Henery reappeared and stood silent and watchful. No man moved hand or foot for a long silent moment. Then Temlock jammed his gun back into his pocket.

"I gave him an even break," he said colorlessly. "Better'n an even break. He was just a little fool like I tol' him; his tongue too long, his brain too slow, an' his draw not quick enough. You boys got anything to say?"

Not a man there answered him. Even men who had a mild toleration almost amounting to a liking for Bendish, and who hated Temlock, had nothing to say. It had been Bendish's quarrel. He had been a fool; Temlock had given him more than an even break. It was finished.

"Come on," said the cool, impudent voice of Crag Verilees. "I'm thirsty. What you drinkin', Temlock?"

And while two men carried Bendish back into a card-room and another man went out to find some of his fellows from the Circle Ten, Temlock and Crag Verilees stood at the bar drinking swiftly and deeply.

"He'll get the wrong man some day," muttered "Stet" Davis, of the Wagon Wheel. And at that the matter rested.

II

FIFTY men had seen the occurrence at the Barrel House. Consequently, "Con" Hathaway, foreman of the Circle Ten and Windy Bendish's boss, had little difficulty in getting the truth of the affair. He found the boys from the Wagon Wheel, talked briefly with Stet Davis, shook his head and had nothing to say either to or about Temlock.

The quarrel had been of Bendish's seeking from first to last, inspired by a natural swaggering braggadocio and several drinks; Bendish had not lost a mare, since he had never owned the animal he rode, and while not a bad sort of fellow was absolutely in the wrong this time. So his body was carried to

Digitized by Google

a quiet place for its dreamless sleep and Temlock was allowed to go on his way unquestioned.

It would have been too much to have expected Temlock to show the slightest emotion over the thing which he had done. It was not the first man he had killed; never had he shot a man with more semblance of right upon his part.

He remained in the Barrel House for half an hour, drinking a good deal, silent, watchful as was his way, spending his money profligately at the bar which he owned, money that would come back to him through the till and Long Henery's steady fingers.

When they had dulled their thirst he and Crag Verilees moved down along the bar to the gambling tables.

For another half hour they sat into a game of stud poker, making two out of a party of six at one of the tables, playing recklessly from the first card dealt face up. Now Temlock's face was hidden under the broad brim of his hat, now Crag Verilees' wolfish eyes and cruel mouth caught the full light of the lamps as he tilted his own hat far back.

"The black bear an' the lean wolf is huntin' in pairs tonight!" a man said to another watching them.

Of the four other men making up the game at Temlock's table, there was one who seemed out of place here, whose manner, appearance and speech did not fit in with the crowd about him. He had seen the shooting of Bendish, and his fine, intellectual face whitened and remained white until he had called for brandy and drunk thirstily.

He had played abstractedly until Temlock and Verilees came to the table, watching them furtively all the time, a little look of fear in his eyes. When they did come he looked up at Temlock with a swift question in his glance, muttered a greeting meant to be cordial, half rose and put out a thin, nervous hand.

Temlock had ignored the hand as he ignored the greeting, though he dropped into a chair at this man's right hand. There was quick scrutiny, a flashing survey, as his eyes went across the nervous man's features.

He marked in the hair the gray that had not been there six months ago, saw that the man looked sixty instead of the fifty that he was, knew that he had had his troubles and his fears, and that he had tried the old, old way of drowning them in brandy.

He saw that he was dressed well in "town clothes," and knew from where the money had come. And then he paid no more attention to him until the half hour had passed and he was tired of the game. Then, as with a glance at Verilees and an answering glance from him, Temlock got to his feet, he laid his big hand on his neighbor's arm.

"Come outside, Ellston," he said quietly. "I want to talk to you."

Ellston's face which had grown a little more placid during the last few minutes flushed up again, and the old look of fear crept into his eyes. For a second he seemed about to refuse to go, a something of weak defiance and stubbornness making the fear look like a child's. And then, as Temlock, already half a dozen steps toward the door, turned a little and looked at him straight between the eyes, he cashed in his few chips hastily, got to his feet and followed.

As the three men went out through the swinging doors, the man who had remarked about Temlock and Verilees "huntin' in pairs," and who evidently was something of a naturalist in his way, added in a barely audible grunt:

"The black bear an' the lean wolf is addin' the jackal to their little party!"

"Who's the white-haired gent?" asked the man to whom he had spoken.

"Him? Why, that's Ellston."

"Who's he?"

"Well, he's a Eastern jasper for one thing, he's a weak sister for another, he's a sort of a lawyer nex', an' all aroun' he's a —— little crook. An' having' talked so much for one evenin' I'm goin' to have a drink an' go up to the Hall an' shake a leg. Come ahead, pardner."

The dance was in full swing when these two had had their drink and came to the hall. The musicians had warmed up to their work, the first frost of the gathering had thawed before the rising warmth of their merriment, couples greeted one another gaily in swing past, brown, brawny men sought out pretty girls in bright-colored home-made gowns, and everywhere in the warm, closely-packed room laughter rang out clear and untroubled.

Only a few here had heard of the trouble at the Barrel House, and these few could not see wherein they would be making things better for poor little Windy Bendish

Digitized by Google

by failing to respond to the gala call of the evening. Dances were infrequent in Hang Town; these men and women, and girls and boys had come, many of them, long miles.

And the men, those who knew, had much to say to their partners when once their tongues loosened to the music and the whirl of the dance, and saw no need of recounting the tale of a brawl in a saloon and so dampening the joy of the night.

IT WAS not quite ten o'clock when Temlock and Verilees, Ellston following them, came to the door of the Hall and stood looking on. Crag Verilees' reason for coming was clear enough. There was no man who rode through the Bad Country to the east or the range lands to the west who would travel further to a dance or who was a more graceful dancer when he got there.

Many a girl who had heard mutterings of Crag Verilees' reputation, and who felt a quick distrust on seeing the lean, wolfish face for the first time, forgot her earliest impressions of the man when once she had danced with him. He had a certain rough grace of speech when he chose, a certain humorous way of saying the little things which don't count and yet which do count, and he danced as he did most other things—a bit recklessly, with all his heart, and well.

As for Temlock, every man in Hang Town tonight who knew the man knew that he would come to the dance. Unlike Crag Verilees, he never danced. He did not lift his hat gracefully to a pretty girl. He had in all of his life evidenced no desire for society, certainly not the society of women. But he would come just to show himself, just to let men know that he was not afraid after the thing that he had done and that he was not hiding from friends of the man he had killed, or from the law.

And Ellston, a man of fifty, had come with them, had followed at Temlock's heels, and men were not surprised. For his face was not the inscrutable, closed book which his companions had learned—if they had not been born with the inherited, instinctive knowledge—to make theirs. He came because Temlock had said bluntly, "Come along!" He came because he was afraid of Temlock, afraid not to come.

When these three men came to the open door to stand there, looking on, Ellston alone hidden a little as he stood behind Temlock and partly in the shadow, Stet Davis, of the Wagon Wheel outfit, was having what he would have termed "the time of his life." He was dancing as Stet Davis knew how, and he was corralling in his long arms the "pretties' little lady as ever made a man's heart sorta turn over."

The eyes of many men who were not dancing followed the couple as they spun and raced about the room to the strains of a merry, mad two-step; the eyes of many men who were dancing themselves left their own partners' faces and followed Stet and the girl dancing with him. And it is to be doubted if any of these masculine eyes saw Stet Davis at all.

She had made her own dress out of white and blue stuff. But then, it looked as if it had just grown into a gown to fit her. It showed her arms above the elbow, round and white, dimpled and, seen by masculine eyes, adorable. It showed a glimpse of a throat, of which the same men's eyes were judging in the same masculine adjectives. It showed her ankles twinkling in their merry dance in a pair of new blue stockings above a pair of distracting blue slippers with wonderfully high French heels.

The oldest men there judged her to be sixteen; the youngest estimated her age at twenty; the man dancing with her had just coaxed a confession from her and knew that she was going to be nineteen in November. He even learned the particular day in November—the second—and before he had escorted her to her seat had made up his mind just what he was going to buy for her birthday present.

For Stet Davis knew that she played the violin, and he remembered that in Rocky Bend, only a hundred and seventy-five miles away, there was "the grandes' fiddle in the world" for sale at the store, and that it cost only a hundred dollars. Never in all of his merry life had Stet Davis had that much money in his hand all at once. But then, such prosaic trifles might well be forgotten and the man forgiven when her gray eyes smiled at his and her red lips curved to laughter at the things he had to say to her.

"WHO'S that girl?" asked Crag Verilees sharply, as Stet Davis and his laughing partner swung by the doorway.

"That girl!" grunted Temlock. "That's a nice an' clear description, ain't it, huh?

Digitized by Google

There's only about a hundred females scamperin' about, an' you asks——"

"If there's a hundred girls in a flock," returned Verilees cooly, "you might know which one I'm lookin' at. When I pick out the fairy of the outfit I ain't the kind to waste my time on the other ninety-nine. I mean the one with Stet Davis."

Perhaps Temlock had known. At any rate his own eyes had been upon her as Verilees spoke; they followed her as she and Davis passed on and until they were lost across the room.

"I ain't interested none in females," he answered bluntly.

"Well, I am," laughed Verilees easily. "An' I'm goin' to get my rope on her. She *can* dance!" as once more his eyes, brightening, lighted upon the girl.

Again Temlock, too, was watching her. His face darkened just a little at Verilees' words, but his shoulder was turned so that his companion could not see his face. And besides, Crag Verilees would not have seen it just then if it had been turned full upon him. His eyes followed the girl in her every gesture, missed no line of the graceful young body, missed nothing of her eyes' laughter or the laughter of her lips, and as he watched her his interest grew and a certain thoughtful speculation grew with it.

When at last Stet Davis escorted her to her place in the heart of a bevy of laughing girls and smiling elder women, Verilees swept off his hat, tossed it to a bench beside the door and took a step forward. Temlock, moving swiftly, put out his big hand and laid it heavily upon Verilees' shoulder.

"Where you goin'?" he demanded quickly, his voice dropping a little.

"To get introduced an' to copper the nex' dance," laughed Verilees.

"Are you a fool?" snapped Temlock.

"No. An' I ain't what mos' folks would call a blind man, neither," retorted Verilees. "There don't much grass grow between my toes, Temlock."

Temlock grunted disgustedly.

"It'll be growin' plenty *over* 'em if you don't look out," he muttered. "I guess you ain't forgot about a man, name of Babe Deveril, of the Two Bar-O, have you, Crag?"

Verilees's face flushed a dark, ominous red.

"Well, what about him?" he asked, shaking off Temlock's hand. "You mean she's his?"

"No," shortly. "I don't know as he ever seen her. But I do know that he's lookin' for you these days, an' I know he's apt to drift into this town tonight, hearin' there's a dance on. An' if you an' me cut out foolishness an' stick close up to each other, it might be as well for both of us before the sun comes up."

He had spoken swiftly, earnestly, his voice so low that only Verilees and Ellston, craning his neck behind them, caught the guarded words. Again Crag Verilees laughed his cool, insolent, unpleasant laugh.

"Much obliged, Temlock," he said briefly. "Only I ain't stayin' in the house ever' time Babe Deveril goes out for a walk."

And he moved away, seeking the girl who had interested him.

"Who's Babe Deveril? Where's the Two Bar-O?" asked Ellston quickly.

Temlock turned and looked down on him contemptuously.

"Listenin' again, huh?" he grunted. "Well, if you're so —— curious, Deveril is foreman of a cow outfit, an' it's the Two Bar-O, an' it's about one hundred an' twenty miles southeast of this. Him an' Crag has mixed before now an' they're due to mix again—same as oil an' water mixes! One'll go to the top an' one'll go down, way down to ——! I wonder"—musingly, his sullen eyes going after Verilees—"which one it'll be?"

Ellston's pale, colorless eyes grew narrow and speculative as he listened.

"What's he done to Deveril?" he asked. "Why is Deveril looking for him?"

Temlock lifted his big, sloping shoulders.

"Don't ask me questions if you don't want to get lies for answers," he retorted. "You know I ain't puttin' my foot in other peoples' affairs much. An' it wouldn't be no grub off'n your plate if you done the same, Ellston. It's Crag's lookout, an' it ain't your'n."

And evidently Crag Verilees was eminently capable of looking after his own destiny. Even in the little thing of getting introduced to a girl who had touched his passing fancy, he showed that. His tall, gaunt form went straight through the men and women on the floor, his keen, restless eye now upon the girl where she was gathering her skirts about her to sit down, now wandering for a man who might attend to the necessary social form for him.

And while Temlock and Ellston spoke of

Digitized by Google

him and watched him, he found his man, took his arm, steered him straight to where the girl was and bowed not ungracefully in acknowledgement of the brief presentation.

Temlock was deep in a brooding silence; Ellston opened his mouth, began to say something, saw Temlock's face turned darkly upon him and swallowed his words. And in a little, when a quadrille was announced, they saw Crag Verilees offer the girl his arm, saw her slip her hand through it and move with him to their place.

Throughout the dance Temlock did not move from the door, nor did he once speak. He found tobacco and papers and with big, slow, firm fingers rolled a cigarette. He watched the crowd of dancers when the music struck up, his eyes running back and forth, stopping oftenest, resting longest, upon Crag Verilees and his pretty partner.

Verilees was talking easily to her, bending over her, and she was laughing at something he was saying. Then a command to "Swing your pardners!" and the two whirled away amidst the bright-colored, gay throng.

Still Temlock stood silent, watching; still Ellston at his side was silent and watched with him. They saw Verilees' tall form, saw the white and blue of the girl's dainty gown, her broad sash flying, glimpsed the gleam of a smile upon the man's sinister face, and again Ellston began abruptly, irritably, to speak.

"Shut up!" growled Temlock. "Come outside. I'm thirsty an' besides, like I tol' you a while ago, I got something to say."

Ellston followed him, looking at him curiously. Temlock, walking swiftly, his great strides making it difficult for the smaller, slighter man to keep up with him, led the way back to the Barrel House. They met many men as they passed along the noisy street, and the men whom they met seemed to see Temlock alone, not to note the other. Some said, "Hello, Temlock!" briefly; some did not speak at all; all eyed him sharply. And he, with no nod, no single word in greeting to any of them, went his swift, straight way his hat low over his eyes, his big fingers flattening the cigarette which already he had allowed to go out.

AT THE saloon Long Henery served them, his silence as profound as Temlock's, his eternal smile masking the things he might be thinking. The two men drank; drank again at Ellston's invitation; drank a third time at Long Henery's. Then Temlock led the way to the rear of the building, to a little card-room where earlier in the evening the body of the man he had killed had lain.

"Now, Ellston," he said abruptly, having closed the door and disposed his big body loosely upon the table—the same table upon which gentle hands had put Windy Bendish. "You know me, an' you know —— well that when I want a thing I get it!"

Ellston, his manner showing the same nervousness, the same hint of fear it had shown when for the first time that night he had seen Temlock, remained standing, now and again forcing his faded eyes to meet Temlock's scowl, now and then dropping them to the foot which toyed with a broken poker-chip.

"Well," Temlock flung at him after a moment of silence, "what do you stan' there like a deef mute for? Didn't you hear me?"

"Yes," answered Ellston, his face flushing, the white hand at his side shutting tight with a little passing spasm of anger, "I know you do."

"You ac' like you was afraid if you opened your mouth I'd pick the gol' out'n your teeth!" snarled Temlock. "I didn't come to town jus' to get drunk tonight, Ellston, an' I didn't come to make a fool of myself at a shindig. I come on business an' I come to see you!"

"Me?" Ellston's eyes flew open in surprise, and the fear in them stood up high and unhidden. Temlock laughed shortly.

"You little coward, you," he jeered. "You ain't got the insides of a sheep-dawg. But you listen jus' the same."

He leaned forward on the table, pushing his hat far back so that Ellston might look into his eyes, and for a moment stared at him in a dark, musing silence. And when again he spoke, his voice carried no further than it was meant to carry. And still Ellston looked nervously toward the closed door and put out his shaking hand as if to stay the flow of the words.

"I got you where I want you, ain't I?" said Temlock. "Mos' things I do, I do pretty much in the open an' I don't care a —— if folks has a right smart guess about it. An' you—" a strange, deep scorn made his low-toned words vibrate—"you crawl and' hide an' sneak an' lie—an' what good's it did you? In a minute, before I'm gettin'

Digitized by Google

a good start sayin' what I got to say, you'll come so close to faintin' that mos' likely I'll have to go out an' get a flask of whisky to keep you standin' up!"

Already Ellston's pale face had gone a deathly white, already he looked the part of a man about to faint. He pulled himself up, returned Temlock's look, weakened and dropped into a chair, his face going into his shaking hands.

"For God's sake—" he began.

"Cut it!" commanded Temlock angrily. "You can do your prayin' tomorrow, after I'm gone."

Ellston looked up quickly, a quick light in his eyes which Temlock saw and understood and which drove a more stinging sneer into his words as he went on mercilessly.

"I've took a good deal of trouble with you, Ellston," he continued. "A sight of bother, firs' an' las', figgerin' I'd use you later on. Like I have already," significantly, a little pause after the words; "like I'm goin' to now, which I hadn't figgered on original. I've took more trouble than you know, Ellston. Now, to make sure you don't make no mistakes, I'm goin' to tell you about it. I doped it out long time ago that this here was a funny place for a man like you to come to to live. I found out *why!*"

Ellston's hands were tight clenched, his lips moistened each other continually. But he made no answer.

"I know you come from a little town in Marylan'," went on Temlock presently. "I know you was cashier of a bank there before you came out here and turned lawyer; I know why you lef' in a hurry. A man as can't gamble no more successful than you, Ellston, an' that can't drink no better, had oughta lef' both of them habits out'n his day's work."

"—— you!" gasped Ellston.

Temlock's lips drew back just a little so that the teeth showed in Temlock's smile; no other change of expression as he looked Ellston straight between the eyes, no change in the voice as he said quietly:

"Don't forget yourself, Ellston! I know you got a gun on your hip an' I know you'd like to use it. But you jus' remember Windy Bendish!"

He saw that Ellston heard, understood, remembered. And then he went on:

"My trouble paid, huh? I can sen' you back where you're wanted mos', Ellston, an' you know it. More'n that, I've got the deadwood on you for more'n one job you've did for me. They don't like forgers much in this State," dryly. "Not much more'n they like cow-rus'lers—maybe not so much."

"You made me do it," muttered Ellston.

"Sure. Not so much because I had to have it done as because it would put you where I'd have you when I did want you—like now. I figgered it might come in handy some day to have a law crook on my side."

"Well," cried Ellston, "what do you want. I'll do it!" He laughed, a weak, mirthless laugh and ran his hand across his dry lips. "I don't care what it is, I'll do it. My God, I can't help myself now!"

"That's the proper talk," said Temlock, eying him with blended curiosity and contempt.

"Well," impatiently, "what is it? Why don't you tell me and get it over with?"

"I'm goin' to. Only—" with slow emphasis—"I wanted you to get it into your head good an' clear firs' that you're goin' to do it, an' it don't make a —— bit of difference what it is; like you says."

He paused a moment, taking time to make a fresh cigarette, lighting it, looking at Ellston's drawn face through the first puff of smoke. And then suddenly it came.

"I never saw but one woman I wanted for mine. I've foun' her now, an' God, Himself, couldn't keep her out'n my hands, Ellston, an' sure not a little shrimp like you! An' that woman——"

"Well?" with swift suspicion.

"Is the one Crag Verilees was dancin' with —— him!"

"Not—not my little girl!"

"I wouldn't say she was yours to look at her," returned Temlock with scant courtesy. "Nor yet to talk with her. A man wouldn't believe a gent' like you, Ellston, could have a kid like her. But——"

"Are you crazy, Temlock?" Ellston was on his feet, the blood racing into his cheeks. "You must be crazy!"

"Yes, I'm crazy," Temlock assured him gravely. "I always said a man was crazy when he let a fool woman come in an' upset his style of life, which that girl has certainly did with me. Now, you jus' go on listenin' a spell longer. That's your game this trip.

"I've saw lots of females in my day an' never los' any sleep rememberin' what they looked like. Then I run acrost your girl.

Digitized by Google

That's three year ago, Ellston, an' I ain't forgot it yet. An' I've saw her more times than one since, an' she's sorta always stuck in my mind. Las' time was six months ago, an' I went away cussin' myself for a fool an' I got drunk to shet her out'n my mind, an' I swore I wasn't goin' to waste my time throwin' my bran' on no little white heifer that ever strayed acrost my trail.

"An' the nex' mornin' I woke up rememberin' the color of her eyes an' the way she did her hair with a flower in it, an' how she looked when I seen her playin' her fiddle, it all cuddled up against her face, an' I've rode some considerable since than an' I ain't forgot a —— bit of it! That's why I come back tonight—cause she dragged me back! Crazy?" He laughed in short self-disgust. "Of course I'm crazy. An' when I seen Stet Davis puttin' his arms aroun' her, an' then Crag——"

He broke off suddenly, his face crimson, his big hands clenched. Slowly he slipped from the table, towering high above Ellston, and his voice was shaking and husky as he said:

"I've got to have her! I'm goin' to have her! I'm goin' to kill any man as tries to keep me away from her! An'—an' she'd be afraid of me at firs'. That's where you come in, do you hear me, Ellston? I've got the dead-wood on you an', by ——! Ellston, I'm man enough to use what's put into my hands! You've got to get her for me. Understand?"

Ellston stared at him incredulously.

"You're crazy, Temlock," he muttered. "Crazy and drunk. Think what you are saying! If I wanted to do this thing, how——"

"How?" snarled Temlock. "You ask me how?"

Then suddenly his great hands shot out. They gripped Ellston's throat, they closed tight, tighter, and they sank their fingers into the flesh. And then as suddenly, Temlock threw the man away from him. Ellston's trembling body struck against the board partition separating the card-room from the main room of the saloon, and he stood there cowering, his face dead-white again, his hands going to his throat, the fear of death in his eyes.

Temlock followed him, coming across the room, thrusting his blazing eyes close down to Ellston's.

"Maybe I'm both crazy an' drunk," he said harshly, his great chest rising and falling to a great intake of air. "Suppose I am? That don't make no difference in your play. You can make her do it; you can drive her to it; you can scare her to it. You can tell her what I'll do to you if you don't! I'll disgrace you firs', an'—I'll kill you nex'!"

Ellston shivered and drew back, his body tighter pressed against the wall.

"I — I'll try," he gasped. "Tomorrow——"

"Tonight! An' you bet you'll try!"

Temlock threw open the door and went out. Ellston hesitated and followed, perhaps through force of habit. It was habit with Ellston to follow.

Temlock went to the bar and Long Henery passed out the bottle. Temlock drank, jerked his head toward Ellston who put out a shaking hand for his glass, and then went out alone. Ellston remained at the bar, drinking.

III

AT MIDNIGHT the hall emptied itself for the supper hour. A steady stream of happy young people flowed down the street to Bill Kane's restaurant; the musicians left their instruments and went to the Barrel House or the Trails End. At one o'clock the dancers were streaming back to the hall, the fiddler was making a deal of preparatory noise, lamps that had been turned low were turned up again, and the dance went on, pulsing and thrilling with a mirth entirely thawed, genuine and unfettered.

Crag Verilees had remained at the dance; he had taken no pains to mask his preference of partners; he had lost no time in asking Ellston's daughter for the supper dance. But she had already given it to Stet Davis and so, while the Wagon Wheel man escorted her to Bill Kane's, Verilees went his dark, solitary way to the Barrel House.

For an hour he played carelessly at the faro table, winning enough to "make wages," and drinking a good deal of whisky. When he heard the first after midnight waltz, he went back to the hall.

At four o'clock some of the boys, tireless and "jus' gittin' warmed up," drew down the window-shades to shut out the coming day and went about among their fellows making up a little purse to keep the musicians good natured and at their posts. It

Digitized by Google

was noted that Stet Davis yielded up what the night had left in his pockets and that he did so grinning broadly.

But at last, it was after five o'clock, the sun was up in the cloudless sky, and the dance broke up as dances must. The last waltz, the "Home Sweet Home," drawn out in slow cadences of lingering regret, the rising of many voices, men's and women's, to the old, old air, a little tightening of arms about slim waists, gentle pressures of little hands in return, and the dance was over.

Stet Davis walked as slowly as Stet Davis knew how, and cattle men are not famed for swiftness on foot. But at last Main Street lay behind, they had come to a little cottage set in a flower garden, the gate had creaked to his hand, he had said good morning at the top step, the gate had creaked again as he went out, and Ellston's daughter went swiftly into the house.

Her cheeks were still flushed from the dance, her eyes bright with the happiness of one of Hang Town's few social gatherings. She opened the door of the small living-room, saw that a lamp was still burning on the rickety table, disputing with its weak rays the golden light of the sun, turned the wick down and moved slowly toward her little bedroom. And then for the first time she was aware that her father was sitting in a big chair in a corner of the room, eying her with a peculiar expression in his eyes which she could not understand, which in a vague way alarmed her.

"What is it, father?" she asked quickly.

She had stopped. She stood very still, looking down at him, wondering. Why should he be up and sitting here at this hour? It was not his way to wait up for her, it was not his way to sit here alone when he came in late at night, or early in the morning.

For a moment he did not answer. His eyes clung to her face, frowning, low-lidded, studying her. She laughed a little uneasily.

"You look at me as though you were trying to make up your mind what sort of a young lady I am!"

"Maybe that is what I am doing," he answered her.

She bit her lip and a little shadow of pain contracted her brows. A certain thickness in the man's words told her what he had been doing while she was at the dance. And still there was a look in his eyes which puzzled her—a look which she had never seen there even while Ellston was drinking heaviest.

"Sit down," he commanded curtly. He had grown restless under her searching regard and angry with her because of it. "I want to talk with you."

"Hadn't we better wait until later, father?" she said gently.

She could think of nothing that he need say now. No doubt, she thought bitterly, it was some trifle which his alcohol had magnified into importance, something which he would forget when he had slept.

"No," he told her briefly. "I have waited for you to come in. I want to talk with you now."

Not only was there something in the man's facial expression to cause her to wonder but a note in his voice made her perplexity grow. Not that it was curt and hard, she was quite used to unpleasant words from him.

Making no reply now, she sank into the chair by which she was standing and watched him, waiting for him to go on.

"—— it, girl!" he cried irritably. "Don't look at me like that—like I was some wild animal you'd never seen before!"

She dropped her eyes a little to humor him, but not so that she failed to see him whip a flask from his coat pocket and drink swiftly before he went on. Now all of the sparkle of happiness had gone out of her eyes, the pleasure-flush from her cheeks. The dance with its tinseled gaiety, which was none the less gay, was gone. She was back in a sordid home with a man whom it was her duty to love.

"MARIAN," he began now, his tone curter, harder, his little air of uneasiness washed away with the sip of brandy. "It has been hard, God knows, out here in this wild country to rear a daughter as a daughter of mine should be reared. And yet, I have done my best. I have sent you to school when other men's daughters were in the kitchen or milking cows and feeding pigs. I have given you the best education circumstances would allow. I have done my best, Marian, to make you happy and to make you a cultured, refined woman. I have done my best, Marian," sharply, as if defying argument on the subject.

Her head drooped a little lower; she hid her eyes entirely from him. A child should

Digitized by Google

love its father, should revere its father, should not hold its father in contempt! And how well, deep down in her heart, the girl knew that he had done nothing for her, that it had been her mother to whom she owed all that she was, a mother who had struggled with life until her only child was almost a woman, who clung loyally to a husband who had lost all illusion for her, and who then had died broken-hearted, broken-spirited, utterly wretched at the end of an utterly wretched life.

"Never once have I asked you to do a thing of importance for me; never have I commanded," went on Ellston in a tone which made the girl wonder if the man actually believed the thing he was saying. "And now, what I am going to suggest is prompted entirely by my love of you, by my sincere wish to see you placed in a position where your happiness will be assured."

He paused, gathering his words for what was to come. She could not help looking at him now, swiftly, wonderingly. What was this thing which he was going to suggest for her good, and which like all things which he suggested, would benefit *him?*

"You are going to be twenty soon, Marian," he said.

"Nineteen, father," she reminded him with a queer little smile. Why should she expect him to remember how old she was when he so seldom remembered her birthday? "It doesn't matter, though."

"Well, nineteen," he retorted sharply. "No, it does not matter. The thing that does matter is that you are a woman now. You are old enough to be married!"

"Father!"

"Yes." He ran a dry tongue along his dry lips. "Married. I have been thinking of this a long time, Marian. I—I have always planned ahead for your welfare. And —I have found the man who is in every way suited to insure your happiness."

"You—have—found——"

She broke off, wordless, breathless, all but stunned by the mental shock of his words. Then more quietly, speaking with slow distinctness, she went on:

"I have no wish to marry, father. I have never seen the man whom I could care enough for—that way—to marry. You see," striving to smile at him, "this is a thing which fathers now-a-days leave to their daughters. I shall know the prince when he comes, father!"

The door behind her father's chair creaked a little; it seemed to her that some one was leaning against it, listening, in the next room, her father's bedroom. But she noted the fact vaguely, subconsciously, and it made little impression upon her otherwise busy mind, then.

"You have more sense than most girls, Marian," Ellston ran on quickly. He too had heard the slight sound and he knew who was listening. "Now is the time to use it. You've got to marry some day, and then you've got to choose wisely and not let your fancies run away with your sane judgment. Where other girls would run after a young fellow for what he has in his face and on the tip of a love-making tongue, you've got to choose a man for what he has in his head and, yes, in his pocket. There's no use being a fool, my girl."

"Who is this man whom you have selected for me?" she asked quietly, shutting the bitterness out of her voice, trying to drive her contempt from her eyes and from her heart.

"I want to tell you about him first," evaded Ellston. "He is older than you, but not too old. A girl should marry a man older than herself. He is not the kind to dangle after a girl and make pretty speeches. He is a man of big interests, of large responsibilities, a very busy business man."

"So far he doesn't sound very interesting," she said as gently as she could. "Not to a girl, father."

"Let me finish!" he cried angrily. "You're a fool if you are not interested! He is the richest man within five hundred miles of us. When—when in a short time, a year or so, he gives up his business and retires, he is going to be in the position to give his wife everything in the world she could ask for—dream of!"

"Even love, father? Or are you forgetting that?"

"I am forgetting nothing. Love? That is the fool's way to spell nonsense with four letters, girl! Leave love alone. It will come."

"But the man? Are you going to tell me who he is?"

"Yes. He is—Temlock!"

HER face went red, red with the wild rush of blood to it. And then it went white, white with pain, horror, unhidden disgust.

"Temlock!" She repeated the name after

Digitized by Google

him, flinging the word at him in hot disdain as she rose to her feet. "Temlock! You come to me and ask me to marry a man like Temlock! Father—" the voice which had shaken a little was very steady now, very low, very distinct—"if you ever so insult me again, whether you are sober or not sober, I am going to leave this place we have called home and go as far away as a good God will let me!"

She passed him swiftly, going to her room. He got to his feet as quickly, though not so steadily, and his hot hand grasped her arm.

"Where are you going?" he cried. "Listen to me."

"I am going to bed," she returned, trying to slip her arm out of his tense grasp. "I do not wish to listen to you tonight."

He pushed her back then and stood in her way, his faded eyes flaming angrily.

"You will listen to me, now!" he told her hoarsely. "I'll make you listen!"

For a little she seemed to hesitate, her gray eyes no longer soft but filled with battle. Then she shrugged her white shoulders and went back to her chair. She did not sit but stood looking steadily at him, one hand tapping at the chair-back.

"Very well," she told him. "Only let's get it over as soon as possible. I'm listening, father."

"You have some foolish prejudice against Temlock," he began a trifle weakly. "What is it?"

"Prejudice? Is it prejudice? Just because I do not wish to consider such a thing as marriage with such a man? A man who is a brawler, a rowdy, a drunkard, a thief, a murderer!"

"He is not a murderer, he——"

"He shot a man less than a dozen hours ago. Perhaps you had not heard? I learned of it as I was leaving the Hall."

"Well, what if he did? I saw it. It was done in self-defense!"

"Perhaps." She didn't seem interested. "He has killed other men, hasn't he—many other men? Was it always—in self-defense?"

"In a country like this," answered Ellston hurriedly, "where men are their own judges, their own law courts——"

"You needn't go on, father. I know what you are going to say. But even if he is, as you'd prove, a very estimable gentleman, still he is not the sort of man I shall marry."

Suddenly Ellston's mood changed, or his mind changed. She saw in his eyes, about the corners of the thin-lipped mouth, that he was going to speak differently. She felt a quick surge of hope, hope that he had sobered a little, that he began to see the monstrosity of the thing his drunken fancy had suggested. And then, with his first words, she knew that he had merely given up one attack to switch to another.

"You owe a certain duty to your father, Marian." He was trying to inject into his utterance a certain gentleness and hinted affection that was falser, more contemptible than anything he had yet done. "I—I am in very great distress, Marian. You can help me now, you and no one else. If you fail me I am a broken, ruined, lost man."

It was cheap, theatrical. It hurt her while it disgusted her. And yet she strove to speak kindly.

"I am sorry. What is it, father?"

"Won't you sit down, Marian? Now—" when she had done as he requested—"I am going to tell you something which I have hidden from you all these years. I so wanted you to be happy, my dear——"

"Don't!" she cried passionately. Oh, how it hurt, how it cut deep into a clean, proud spirit to have the man sink to a hypocrisy like this! "Tell me what you have to tell me and in as few words as you can. Don't you see I—I'm so tired——"

"I was cashier in a bank in the East," he said, talking rapidly, eyeing her sharply. "A—a very large sum of money was taken—stolen, Marian. I—I didn't do the thing, of course. But it looked as though I had done it, the thief so cunningly planned his evidence. I should have been convicted on false, circumstantial evidence. I had to leave, to come away. I came here——"

"Did mother know?" she asked quickly.

"Yes. She knew. Of course she knew that I was not guilty——"

"Go on," said Marian wearily.

"That is why I have been here all these years, under a name that is not rightfully mine. If I went back, if it was learned that I am here, I should——"

"Temlock knows?" she asked, paying no heed to the rush of his words.

"Yes, yes! That is it! And unless you marry him he swears——"

When he saw her white face as she turned it full upon him, when he noted the carriage of her head as she again rose and stood very still, his words died down in his throat.

Digitized by Google

"I am sorry, father," she said steadily, although her heart pained her at every word, "that your sin has found you out. I am sorrier that I can not help you in the way you suggest. I am sorrier yet that you should seek your way out by trying to barter to a man like Temlock your own daughter's body and happiness. I am sorrier that you should not have been man enough to take on your soul the lesser crime of killing the man who suggested the thing to you. And most of all I am sorry that I could not have known and understood, while I was a little girl, that I might have helped poor mother as one woman may help another when she understands."

And then, without looking toward him, she passed slowly to her room, opened the door and went in, closing it softly behind her. And Ellston did not rise from his chair, did not put out a hand now to stop her.

IV

SCARCELY had Marian's door closed behind her when she heard the board on the floor in her father's bedroom creak under a cautious but heavy tread. She knew that Ellston had not moved from his chair; she remembered now with swift indignation the creaking of the door a little while ago which had so nearly passed unnoticed.

Temlock was in the house. He had driven her father to do this thing and he had come to listen to be sure that a man whom he knew to be a coward was not a traitor to him, too.

"It is unbelievable!" breathed the girl as she stood at her little window, the fresh, cool morning air blowing across her hot cheeks. "I—I didn't think he would do a thing like this!"

And yet she was not so greatly surprised as she told herself she was. Not being blind or a fool she could not fail to know years ago, while she was still in very short dresses and very long curls, the sort of man her father was. He dressed well when she had only the old things, made over, to wear. He dined well at the restaurant when he forgot to send anything up from the grocer.

At times when there were clients and he had money she saw little of him, and the saloons and gaming-tables saw much. At other times, when there were many more creditors than clients, she saw much of him and of his weak, quarrelsome, complaining, selfish nature. If at any time in her life she should have had a reason to ask herself the question, "Would he sell me and my happiness for a handful of money?" she would have known how to answer the question.

She heard her father get from his chair and go to his room. No sound of voices came to her though only a thin board partition separated the two rooms. But a moment later she heard an outside door open cautiously, heard steps leaving the house by the rear, and knew that he had gone out, and that Temlock had gone with him.

It was full, bright morning now. The town which had frolicked all night was now sinking into the stupor of a dissipated sleep. The saddle-horses had gone from the hitching-rails, up and down the street, the boys who had come in from the ranges were riding sleepily homeward, dozing in their saddles, yawning over the thoughts of a day's work.

Marian stood at her window a long time, looking thoughtfully out across the barren, rugged lands of the Bad Country to the east, solving her own destiny soberly. There was no hot anger beating in her brain now to make her vision clouded. She looked backward over the past, she analyzed the present, she turned her eyes toward the future.

"When there is only one thing to do," she told herself at last, speaking in a low, hushed voice and with a sad, wistful little smile, "one needn't take a very long time in doing it."

She drew down her shade and undressed swiftly. The light little gown of blue and white with the broad sash she put a little tenderly into her old trunk. Her dainty slippers and blue cotton stockings went with it. And then her mouth and eyes determined, she dressed quickly, putting on her best riding-things, blouse and skirt, her broad-brimmed hat, her boots which she laced with hasty fingers, then her gantlets.

She went to a corner of the room and took up her violin in its case. Then, with a long last look at the little room which she had made a part of herself with its many feminine odds and ends, with best-loved books and pictures, she went out into the dining-room.

Digitized by Google

She did not pause here but went on hastily to the kitchen. Hanging on the wall was her rifle. She took it down, slung it across her shoulders by its strap, ran a cartridge-belt around her waist, thrust a rudely done-up luncheon into her blouse and hurried out to the little stable behind the house.

A four-year-old mare, with brightening eyes and up-pricked ears, thrust a white nose out of the barn window and whickered a glad good morning.

"We're going for a long ride, you and I, Lady," she said softly. "We're going to play at a sort of "Babes-in-the-Wood" game. God will have to be good, very good to us, Lady."

Where were they two going, Marian and Lady? Marian didn't know, Lady didn't care. Somewhere, anywhere to be gone from here. Yes, the girl knew her father very, very well. She knew Temlock, too. A little from casual acquaintance, more from hearsay, a vast deal more from pure instinct.

She knew what would happen if she did not go and go now. Temlock would drive her father as a sheep-dog drives a sheep; Ellston would make her days and nights utterly wretched, as he had made her mother's. She must either go away or do the thing which he asked—commanded.

She saddled quickly. By now Temlock and Ellston would be at the Barrel House, drinking no doubt, certainly talking about her. She must go before they came out again; go now, while the town dozed after its frolic.

She lead the mare from the barn, strapped her rifle to the saddle, took her violin in her hand and mounted. There was no one in sight, not a man or woman or child. Now was the time. And where?

Her plans were formulating rapidly. She would ride east, into the Bad Country. Not five hundred yards away was a gorge down into which she could ride and be lost to all eyes in Hang Town. Then she could hurry on all day, turning southward after a while, and riding toward some one of the small settlements.

And then, just as she was about to touch the horse's side with her spur, a man rode around the corner of the barn and jerked his horse to a standstill not ten feet from her, sweeping off his flapping hat as he did so.

"Pete!" she said quickly.

"Yes, Miss—Pete. He un'stan'. He go 'long. Some day, bimeby, Pete he kill Temlock.

He was a half-breed, unkempt, evil looking, tattered, black with his dark blood and unshaven scraggling beard; Indian Pete who had been Ellston's servant or hired man, or what you please, for many years.

"Pete go 'long," he repeated quietly. "Pete heap savvy. Li'l w'ile ago hear two men talk, Temlock an' your papa. Pete un'stan'. You heap mad, you go 'way. Pete go, too."

"Thank you, Pete," she said softly, a sudden rush of tears stinging her eyes. "You are very good to me. But I must go alone this time, Pete."

Indian Pete shook his head stubbornly, his ragged, black hair swinging back and forth about his neck.

"No good go 'lone," he grumbled. "Too l'il girl. Pete go too." He tapped significantly the rifle under his leg. "Pete good shot," he added bluntly.

She started to argue but saw a stubbornness in the Indian's eyes which she knew no few words of hers could shake. He would argue, it would take time, and she must get away before Temlock and Ellston saw her. She would let him come with her until they were far out of sight of Hang Town. Then she could send him back.

"All right, Pete," she answered then. "Come on!"

She touched Lady with the suspended spur and shot out from the barn toward the broken reaches of the Bad Country, followed by the Indian upon his shaggy cow-pony.

NOT yet had the Bad Country received its proper name upon the official maps. But the men who rode over it when they must, skirted it when they might, slipped into it for hiding and protection when they were hard driven, had always known it as the Bad Country and would always call it that until some mighty upheaval came to change its hard, almost trackless wastes.

It rose here and there into rugged knolls, flinty, barren, strewn with lava blocks and conglomerate, pricked through by thorn-tipped cactus, denizened by the unlovely desert things which need little water. It sank between the bleak hills into deep

Digitized by Google

gorges, twisting like blistering, tortured serpents through a land of little shade.

It was as if an ocean in the fury of a driving storm had been held still for an instant, and during that instant petrified. The sort of deserted land to call to a man only when he sought to flee from his kind, a haven that protected with its very threat.

In a little, Marian Ellston and Indian Pete at her mare's heels had dropped down into the first hollow, sped around a rocky eminence and entered the tortuous gorge, which cut with its broken, upthrust fragments of rock at their horses' fetlocks. And now, if they had not already been seen, no one would see them. And it would be a keen eye that tracked here.

The girl forgot that her body was already tired, forgot that she had had no rest or sleep all night, forgot even that Indian Pete was riding with her. The thing that claimed her eager thoughts drove out all other things now.

Behind her was a threat, a danger which made her shudder. Before her, what? That was the thing to wrestle with. She could hide here; she would be safe from pursuit, perhaps. She *must* be safe from pursuit. For if they came up with her out here, these men, one of whom she distrusted so keenly, one of whom she hated so with rising hatred. . . .

She must not think of that, she must not let her mind dwell upon a possibility which she must make impossible! She must look beyond the Bad Country, see herself riding out of it unharmed, and shape her life from that time on.

Now she was alone in the world. She must make her own way. She was not afraid of that, for, in truth, she had been making her own way for years now. She had given music lessons when she could get pupils; she had done little odds and ends that brought her the small sums of money necessary to her.

She was not afraid to work; she would go to some town and do anything. She would cook, she would strive to go on with her music, she would make up a class and teach, she might even find a vacancy in some little, sheltered country school.

Yes, she would turn south presently and ride to one of the little towns fifty or seventy-five miles distant from Hang Town. There were range lands there; there were, too, many small farms. That would mean women and children. That would mean friends. She would build of them a bulwark between her new and her old life, between herself and pursuit.

Still she rode five miles due east before she thought of turning southward, before she remembered that she was going to send Indian Pete back. What would she do with him when she came to the settlement? What use would she have for a retainer? The thought made her smile a little.

"Pete—" she had reined in her mare and waited for him to come to her side—"I want to talk with you."

"All right," answered the breed briefly. "Talk. Me no go back."

"But," she answered him seriously, not impatiently, as she thought how he was the only friend to care about where she went or to go with her, "I can't let you, Pete. It's so good of you, and oh, I am so grateful! But don't you see, Pete, you can't help me and I wouldn't know what to do with you."

He nodded. He had dropped his reins upon his horse's neck; his dark fingers were busy rolling a cigarette. He did not trouble to look up.

"Pete un'stan'," he answered.

"That is good Pete," she said with a little sigh of relief. She put out her hand. "Thank you. And when you get back you won't tell father——"

"No tell nothin'," grunted Indian Pete. "No go back!"

"But I thought that you said——"

"Said me un'stan'," he grunted, licking the edge of his cigarette paper and searching in his vest-pocket for a match. "Un' stan' Temlock heap bad man. Him ketch you out here, then what? Then Pete not here, bad. Pete here——"

He tapped his rifle with his black nails.

"But he won't find me!" she cried, impatient now. "And I don't want you, Pete. I won't have you! Go back!"

"Um," grunted Pete noncommittally.

"I tell you," she cried imperiously, in the old way natural to her since when, a little girl, she had whipped her dark curls back and forth in displeasure of the one who had gainsaid her, "I am going to have my way! I know that you are trying to be good to me but I must be the one to judge. You must let me go on alone, Pete."

"Much bad men out yonder." Pete waved his arm, designating all of the

Digitized by Google

mysterious solitudes of the Bad Country. "Not good you go 'lone. Pete come, too. Plenty talk, plenty mad, no difference. All same, Pete come. That's all."

And when Indian Pete took refuge in his old formula, "That's all," delivered with a fine air of finality, that ended the matter. Marian bit her lip, sat frowning at him a moment, and then giving Lady the spur, shot on down the long gorge. And Indian Pete, with a little grunt of satisfaction, followed her.

The sun climbed high through the clear, hot sky; little shadows grew black at the bases of black rocks; the early breeze which had seemed out of place here in this weary land because it had been light and fresh and singing of gay things, died down as if it had fainted and drooped from fatigue of wandering over the dry miles. The air was still now save where, yonder in the distances, it seemed a tangible, visible thing, dancing in lines of shimmering heat.

Long ago, Hang Town had been lost behind the two figures moving slowly across the burning landscape. Here in this land of lost things everything was denied to aching eyes except the scorching scrub, the glistening cactus, the scant, dry grass in the lower hollows, the blistering rocks. Since the heat of the day had sprung out upon them there had been no water.

Still this was no unknown land to Marian Ellston. She had lived always upon the rim of this menacing thing; she had since a little girl been used to riding far out alone. She knew where there was a water-hole, and a little before noon she and Indian Pete rode their sweating horses to it.

Now, as she slipped from the saddle to drink and rest and eat a little, she felt for the first time that she was very, very tired. She was accustomed to long, hard rides and yet she knew that even the hard-muscled cowboys who would be riding range today after a night of quadrilles and polkas and two-steps and schottisches would be as tired as she was. And she had but begun her journey.

Now she would turn southward or at least toward the southeast. Now she dared ride no further straight on into the Bad Country. For of the lands lying beyond this place she knew nothing; she might wander for hours, for days even, and find no more water.

Pete threw himself down upon the ground, drank deep at the side of his drinking pony, got up to squat in the shade of the solitary stunted oak by the spring, made a swift frugal meal from the package at his own saddle-strings, made another of his countless cigarettes, pulled his hat over his eyes and dozed. And Marian, with the bole of the tree between them, lay down and closed her own eyes. And she, too, dozed a little.

But she slept not restfully and not long. So much lay behind her which she must put further and further behind, so much before her toward which she must hasten, that she was anxious to be again in the saddle, to see the dull monotone of the barren earth slipping away under her mare's hoofs.

"Pete," she said when an hour had passed and she saw that the man's shifting black eyes were upon her, "I'm going on now. There is really no need of you coming with me. I shall turn south here and ride into Rocklin. It's only about twenty-five miles from here. I'll get there before it is night."

"Rocklin?" asked Pete curiously. "You know plenty folks there, Miss?"

"No," she answered a little wearily. "I know no one there, Pete. But I shall be safe."

"Safe!" he grunted his interruption.

It was not Indian Pete's way to interrupt and she looked for an explanation in his eyes. It was not his way to explain, either, and yet he went on to say:

"Not safe there! Why? Cause Pete no —— fool; he know! Listen, Miss: Same time you dance las' night, Pete come back from Main Street. Two men talkin' in your house. Pete got good ears, got sense, hear much, talk little. Hear Temlock talk; hear Ellston. Temlock say, 'Make Marian marry me!' Ellston say, 'Maybeso can't.' Temlock say, 'Make her. Tell her she got to.' Ellston say, 'She get mad.' Temlock say, 'All right. Get mad, spunky girl, then what?' 'Run 'way', Ellston say. 'Fine!' Temlock say. 'Run 'way, go some town not so far. No frien's there; me come get night time.' "

Marian shuddered. She fancied that she could hear the men saying these things, planning upon her doing just the thing that she was doing now.

"Temlock big man," went on the Indian abruptly, after his short silence. "Bad man, thief, big man anyhow. Many frien's in Hang Town, many frien's in Rocklin,

Digitized by Google

many frien's all over." Again he swept out his arm, waving widely. "You go there, pretty soon Temlock come. Then ——" He snapped his fingers.

There was truth in what Pete was saying, and she knew it. And yet. . . .

"I've got to go somewhere, Pete!" she cried. "I can't stay here."

"No stay here," he answered steadily. "No go town. Pete show you. Ride li'l more longer, twenty mile over yonder. He pointed due east into the heart of the Bad Country. "Pete know water-hole there, deer, rabbits, birds. Fool miner build one time dugout house. Plenty bad, good enough. Him die. You go there; you stay few day, week, Temlock can't find. No man find. No man know that place but Indian. Indian un'stan' much, talk not much. Week go by; Temlock got business go 'way; you get out go town far off."

He grew suddenly silent, his eyes wandering far off to the dot in the sky where a hawk was sailing. He seemed to have lost all interest in the conversation. Marian looked at him, looked long back whence they had ridden, looked long to the southward.

And then, because she was very tired and very much more afraid of the haunts of men than of the haunts of the wild things of these bleak solitudes, she told Indian Pete to ride on, due east. And drooping wearily in the saddle, she followed him.

V

IT WAS five days and some hours after Marian and Indian Pete rode away from the spring toward the heart of the Bad Country that another horse and rider stopped here to drink deep of the warm, alkali water and to rest a little.

They came up from the south, the lean-barreled, rangy sorrel horse and the man. The horse was sweat and gray 'dust-covered, worn and thirsty. Upon its hide where the branding-iron had pressed, it carried its identification as a cow-horse of the Two Bar-O. The Two Bar-O lay a good hundred miles to the southward, and yet a man looking at the signs of fatigue upon a body which nature had gone far toward building as a perfect example of tirelessness, would have said that the hundred miles had been traversed since dawn.

Behind the saddle was the man's coat, rolled neatly, tied by the leather saddle-strings, coated deep with gray dust. The rifle-holster, strapped under the rider's leg was empty; he carried the heavy Winchester 30-30 across the hollow of his arm. When a man carries his rifle this way in this part of the Bad Country it is an even break whether he is looking for some one or some one is looking for him.

The man's face told nothing of his purpose, gave no hint whether it were a stern quest or a wish to escape pursuit which brought him here. He was ready, ready for anything which might spring up within range of eye or gun upon all of the wide reach of broken landscape—his eyes told that.

The eyes were watchful, quick, unresting, as they sought into each shadow and hollow. The face, the expression in spite of the quiet eagerness and alertness, was not the face of a man one might expect here either in flight from justice or in that deadly search which carries men into such trackless wastes of the world.

It was the face of a young man and spoke of high good-nature, of a certain sort of careless acceptance of what the day brought that was almost recklessness, of a vast satisfaction with life as it was. He might have been twenty-five; it was certain that he did not look over twenty-one.

The lines of the mouth spoke of an unbittered gentleness, the eyes though keen were the eyes of a boy, clear and pleasant, and like the whole personality of him bespeaking good humor and a reckless, youthful joy of living. It was what men saw in the man's face and not what they came to read in his soul that caused them to name him "Babe" Deveril.

When he had satisfied himself with a long searching survey of the country about him that he and his horse were the sole outsiders hereabouts, he slipped from the saddle and removed the heavy Spanish bit from the sorrel's mouth.

"Drink, you old son-of-a-gun you," he said genially. "Here's hopin' you haven't forgotten the taste of water! And I'm passin' it to you straight, Dancer, there's not a cow-horse born with four legs that could eat up a long trail the way you do it."

Before drinking himself he left his horse at the water-hole and moved a few steps to the side, his eyes busy with something

Digitized by Google

which had caught them before he dismounted and which were just now of more interest to them than water to a parched throat. There was a little damp soil half a dozen yards from the trunk of the sturdy oak tree and in the soft dirt there were tracks.

"A week old," he told himself, stooping over them. "Maybe not quite that bad. Not over that. Two horses, travelin' together. Headed due East. Most likely from Hang Town. Now, who'd that be? Not Temlock, because he was in Rocklin three days ago. And anyway, he wouldn't ride north to here and then turn off at right angles. It *might* be Crag Verilees——"

He broke off, frowned at the signs a moment, found the cigarette-stubs Indian Pete had thrown down and through force of habit had ground into the loose earth with his boot-heel. Then straightening up, looking off eastward, he shook his head.

"Don't believe it. It's a little bit too good to be true. And besides, I'm missin' my bet all 'round if Verilees isn't huntin' mighty close to Temlock's side these days. They've got something on that—Mama, come and spank me! What's this?"

It was another track, lighter, smaller, fast filling with fine dust scattered by the wind. He got down on his knees to make sure, and when he had made sure he was not certain that his eyes were telling him the truth. The print was of a woman's boot! He blew a little of the loose dust out; the track though dim was plain. And in a moment he found another.

"A man and a woman!" he muttered. "Ridin' from Hang Town way, headin' straight into—that!"

Again he stared off into the east, his eyes passing over the ugly lava rock and brown soil, journeying into the dim distances where in the blue haze of the far-off landscape the rugged ugliness was softened and colored to a strange mystic beauty. A woman—riding straight into—that!

"It might be Crag Verilees after all," he muttered. "Verilees and his latest love story. What a woman! But if a man goes down straight to —— there'll always be a woman to go with him."

Again he broke off shortly and a quick anger darkened his eyes.

"If a woman goes and mixes in the game and spoils my aim," he grunted, "I'm goin' to swear!"

But his good humor came back presently when he shrugged his shoulders and returned to the water-hole. He put his rifle down, tossed his hat to lie beside it, cooled his head by pouring many scooped-up hands of water over it and then lying upon his stomach drank from the little pool which Dancer had not muddied.

Neither the taste nor temperature of the water were such as would appeal to an Epicure. But Epicures know better than to push into the Bad Country. The water was wet and served its purpose, and Babe Deveril grunted his deep satisfaction as he squatted down to roll his cigarette.

It was already late afternoon. A hard day's ride lay behind him; at least a score of hard miles lay baking and blistering in front. He cocked his eye up at the sky, judged the time accurately and swiftly, pursed his lips as he turned his gaze to his horse, and with the first wisp of smoke curling up from the end of his cigarette got to his feet and went to drag Dancer's saddle off.

"Don't go and make any mistakes, you old wall-eyed, ugly-lookin', weak-kneed son of a saw-horse," he grunted affectionately, as he dropped the saddle to the ground and began to untie the rolled-up coat. "You're not goin' to spend a vacation here. Get out! Take your old nose out of my ear or I'll just naturally beat you to death with my fist. Yes, it's barley, you old pie-eatin' glutton. And it's the last you get— Oh, well, take it if you want it more than I do."

He went back to the oak and his own rude meal, watching Dancer with deep satisfaction as the horse thrust his nose into the little hollow where Deveril had poured the grain.

Dancer ate, his flapping lips giving audible sounds of his enjoyment, blending harmoniously with the music of the crunching teeth and serving the further purpose of cleaning up the last elusive grains upon the side. His master, having eaten and smoked his cigarette, lay back, drawing his hat over his face and went to sleep.

WHEN he sat up again and cocked his eye at the sun he announced to Dancer that it was five o'clock and time to stagger on. He saddled, drank again, informed his horse that he was a fool if he didn't drink again himself in a second edition of hell like this, swung into the

Digitized by Google

saddle and, carrying his rifle across the hollow of his left arm, rode on.

And now he was doing the thing which he had said that Temlock would not do; he was turning at right angles to the trail he had followed until now; he was following as nearly as he could the trail which a man and a woman had made a few days ago. For it might be Crag Verilees' trail.

"A horse can do a hundred and fifty miles on a trail like this and still be good for something besides puttin' into corned-beef cans," he informed the animal under him. "We're goin' to prove it, Dancer. Now, shake a leg."

For a mile Deveril rode along a sort of ridge which led very gradually upward. Then he came to the top of a rocky hill, and, sitting there, bringing his horse to a standstill, he gazed long and searchingly in all directions about him. He had lost the trail of the man and woman; he had not tried to keep it. That would have meant very many stops, much riding to the side this way and that, of constant searching in the little hollows and where the scant soil might retain brief record of a passing foot. And now, as a result of what he saw, he slipped his rifle into its case.

Here before him the land was less broken, or at least broken into less marked gorges and hills. There was little vegetation; no single clump of bushes behind which a man might be in hiding. If there were another man beside Babe Deveril within many miles of him, he knew that he should see that man long before he came within reach of a rifle-shot.

Now he rode slowly, saving his horse, slumping a little forward in the saddle, dozing in the still heat of the late afternoon. At times he seemed to be asleep, his tall, clean-cut body swaying freely with the horse's stride. At times he sat straight up, his eyes clear and keen and watchful as he came to the top of a rise. At times he defied the unbroken stillness about him by breaking into a drawling, softly-hummed song of the cattle lands.

So the late afternoon slipped away, dusk came and grew tremulous and fresh with the first faint breeze, whispering of the coolness of night. As from the harsh, ugly cactus in this barren land a soft, gloriously-colored blossom puts forth, so from the dry, unlovely day, came the rich flower of the brilliant sunset.

Behind him there was a broad and broadening band of scarlet, bordered with pure, pale shades of pink and green; even the sky above grew tinted, and then, far ahead to the east, where again the ground underfoot was climbing upward into rugged hills and deep gorges, the blue above, the gray beneath, drew together, blended, the sky-line lost, earth and air curtained with the soft-hued curtain of the evening's weaving.

The spring lay something more than twenty miles behind him now. Rest, he thought, lay at least that far in front. For he did not know of the spring of which Indian Pete had told Marian and which lay only two or three miles ahead and a little to the north of the trail he was now picking out.

"Pretty soon we won't be able to see much, Dancer," he said out of a long silence. "But then, if there should happen to be anybody about who'd like to try a little sharpshooting he won't be able——"

HE DIDN'T finish. The utter stillness of the Bad Country was broken by the clear crack of a rifle, and Babe Deveril, jerking his horse back upon its haunches, stooped and drew his own 30-30 swiftly out of its sheath.

"The son-of-a-gun——" he breathed.

And again he did not finish. There was a second shot, and he saw the streak of flame telling him whence it came. Not five hundred yards away, straight ahead of him, where there was a great pile of rocks.

He whipped up his rifle and fired back. A third shot, a scream of pain from Dancer, and Babe Deveril was on his feet, his face white and set, his eyes going black and hard.

Again he fired, running a little to the side, dropping behind a rock and firing over the top. There was little chance of his bullets finding a target but . . . .

But Dancer was down, was struggling to rise and could only get half-way up to fall back again, and the rage in Babe Deveril's heart was crying for that expression which can find outlet only in hot lead. Another shot from the pile of rocks, a bullet singing by him as it glanced from a slab of hardened lava, and then the mad pounding of a horse's hoofs, running.

"—— him!" choked Babe Deveril, glaring helplessly at the mound behind which his assailant was racing into the swiftly coming night.

He was running forward now, hoping to

Digitized by Google

get to the top of the hill in time to get one glimpse of the man who had shot and run. He heard Dancer behind him, heard the horse struggling to rise, heard the strange sound of a horse moaning in pain, ran faster, came to the pile of rocks, heard running hoofs once more, clambered up and had one fleeting view of a horse and rider already growing vague in the distance.

He fired, cursed when he knew that he had never had a chance in ten thousand to hit that dim, fleeing mark, knew that the night had swallowed up the man whom just now he would have given his left hand to have before him, and then, his teeth set hard, he went back to his horse.

"Dancer! Poor old Dancer!"

The struggling animal grew suddenly quiet. Its eyes turned piteously, pleadingly upon its master. He had had his leg cut once with barbed wire—that master had cared for him, had cured him. Now Dancer was begging mutely and eloquently for the almighty hand of his master to pluck out that pain which shot through his vitals, to care for him now, to cure him now. All of the eloquence which a dumb brute must express in that only way which God has given to him, shone in Dancer's eyes.

"Don't, Dancer! —— it, don't!"

For it seemed to Babe Deveril that, more clear than the agony in the horse's eyes was his faith in his master, his certainty that the master whom he had borne all day and many days before, doing his horse's best, was going to wrench that pain out of him, to make him well.

So Dancer, lying upon his side now, was very still, waiting. Babe Deveril put a gentle hand upon the neck that was outstretched toward him, and coming close, looked for his horse's wound. Looked and found that a bullet had broken the thin, tireless foreleg, that a bullet had ripped deep into the bleeding side. And Dancer was looking to him, waiting for him to quiet the pain and make him well.

"Dancer—" Babe Deveril was saying; and his voice shook on the one word and broke utterly, and the tears sprang up scalding in his eyes and overflowed and ran down his dusty face; broke off and for a little found no word to say. He knew the answer he must give—the only answer.

Then he went down on his knees. He put both arms about Dancer's neck and laid his soiled, tear-wet cheek against the horse's head. And now he found what to say and said it, whispering the words softly into Dancer's ear. It was just—

"Good-by!"

Of all the things in his life this was the hardest.

He turned away before the thin stream of smoke cleared.

"I'll find him soon or late, Dancer," was the thought in his heart. Aloud he said nothing. His throat hurt him. And he hastened on through the gathering night, his face still wet.

VI

HE LEFT Dancer, the heavy silvered Spanish bit in the horse's mouth, the saddle on its back. Dancer had done his work up to the last and it was a sort of sad satisfaction to Deveril that the faithful animal had died in the trappings which bespoke his service, and now lay in his insignia like a gentleman.

Deveril pushed on, rifle in hand, came again to the pile of rocks behind which the man had hidden who had shot Dancer, and plunged on an downward into the thickening night, praying dumbly that his good fortune might lead him the right way.

He had thought that the thud of retreating hoofs had grown faint toward the northeast and he went that way. He had no plan now, no thought but to push on with what speed he might, to follow blindly the man whom he wanted now more than he wanted Crag Verilees.

And then the swift thought came to him: "Was it Verilees who had fired those shots?" It might be. He wished that it was, that he could be certain of it. It would be another thing to stiffen the anger within him, to steady his arm when the time came. He hoped that this, too, was Crag Verilees' work!

He had not yet thought of his own predicament. Rage stood so high in his soul that for a little as he stumbled on he did not think of himself. But the shock of realization came to him suddenly.

He was on foot; he was in a land of little water; he was without food and had not tasted food since early morning. He knew of no single water-hole here nearer than the one he and Dancer had left behind them in the afternoon, and that was twenty miles away.

"He didn't even try to hit me!" muttered

Digitized by Google

Deveril angrily. "He figured that if he could just kill my horse, thirst would do the rest for me. He planned me to wear myself out and go mad and die. It's very much like Crag Verilees' sort of work."

With the thought came caution. He had not brought a canteen because he would not have suffered for water if he still had his horse between his knees. Now he would suffer. Twenty miles on foot and he was already tired, already thirsty. He must push on; he must not go at that killing pace; he must not loiter; he must continue steadily.

Twenty miles! He could do it; he would do it. It would take seven or eight hours over this broken ground; it might require ten. But he would come to the water-hole of which he knew before the heat of tomorrow's sun found him out.

Still he could not, he would not yet give over all hope, vain as he knew it to be, of seeing something of the man he followed. Still he kept a little to the north of the trail which led to the spring he sought. It might mean the wasting of an hour; it might mean that, fortune with him, he squared things for Dancer before morning. Hope dies hard in men like Babe Deveril.

He stopped to make a cigarette, that old, faithful friend to the cowboy when he wants a moment of quiet thinking and thorough calm. He felt in his vest pockets for a match and found that he had only three left.

"I sure came away half-cocked on this trip," he grunted as he lighted one of the precious matches. And then, before the little flame had died down, he swung about with a new thought and made his way back to the pile of rocks.

It was very dark. Still groping on his hands and knees he found some scant, dry weeds, a handful of twigs and a dry bunch of sage brush. He made a little pile of his fuel close to the spot where he judged that other man had waited in hiding, and stepped away as a second match set its fire to dancing through the twigs. It was a slim chance but he was not going to miss a bet in this game. It was unlikely but it was possible that the man had dropped something.

In an instant his little fire told him where the man had stood. Deveril's eager eyes saw the glint of something on the ground, wedged in between two stones. It winked at him like a diamond. Reckless of the chance that he might even now be watched, that his tall frame might make a target not impossible to a rifle-ball in the night, he stepped into the circle of firelight and picked the thing up. It was an empty cartridge, one of the three that had been fired from here only a few minutes ago.

"It talks," he muttered, "but it don't say much! Winchester, and the country is full of Winchesters! Worse luck yet, it's a 30-30, and 30-30's are as common as dirt."

He flung it away from him, his eyes again seeking the ground for a sign, something that might "talk and say something!" And, because his eyes were the keen, trained eyes of the man who lives out of doors and who must, day after day, read the message written by running hoofs, he found the sign and it told him something.

He saw where the man had stood in a little clear space behind the rocks, saw the print of the boot-heels in a small space of soft, dry earth. And, when his firelight leaped to its highest just before beginning to die down, he knew that the boots which had made these tracks were the same boots which had made those other tracks back yonder at the spring.

It was simple. They were old boots and since coming from the bootmaker, twins, they had grown to have their distinct personalities. The boot on the right foot had its sole worn nearly through just under the ball of the foot and left in the imprint, otherwise smooth, a roughening in the soil. The man had stood very still here, waiting perhaps for several minutes. The tracks had sunk deep. That sign was clear.

The man who had made those boots had put into the leather a death warrant. He had made the boot for the left foot of tough leather, the other of a poorer grade. Even the soles and heels were different. The left heel made a small, clear imprint as of a new boot. The other was broader, not so clear, and told Babe Deveril that a part of that heel was gone.

"I've got your picture, you night-bloomin' murderer," he grunted with something of satisfaction. "Just so I come up with you before you get a new pair of boots!"

His fire burned down and he had found nothing more. But he had found much and he was satisfied. He stamped out the few dying embers and again turned eastward, again keeping a shade toward the north.

Digitized by Google

ALTHOUGH, again and again, as he made his steady way, he paused and listened, he heard nowhere a sound to tell him that the man he sought was within many miles of him. The hoof-beats that had died down so rapidly came no more; the unbroken darkness gave no sign. And so, for the first hour, he strode on, fixing his course by the stars and holding to it as well as the gorges and rocky hills would allow.

In that first hour he had traveled close to three miles, and close to the end of the night's journey. He was tired, hungry, thirsty. He was again in sad need of the only solace possible to him now, the solace of a cigarette. And he had only the one match left. He felt through all of his pockets systematically and carefully. He had only the one match.

"If I save it," he told himself thoughtfully, "I'll be dyin' for a smoke all night. If I use it now, well, I'll know I can't have a smoke after the one and I won't think about it."

So he sat down upon a little knoll, made his cigarette slowly and lighted it. He would rest, smoke and wait for the moon which already gave a bright promise of rising. The moon came up, close to the full, and threw a mellow radiance over the hard landscape, softening it. And still he waited and rested, lighting a second cigarette from the end of the first, treasuring his fire yet a little longer.

Meanwhile his eyes went far ahead, searching to right and left for the way he should go. From the base of his knoll the land to the north swelled up in a long rise, growing steep towards its crest, promising a sort of dry valley upon the far side. Elsewhere the rough country was the same broken, hard floor.

"A last slim chance," said Deveril thoughtfully. "I'll climb that ridge to the north and have a look down on the other side. He rode this way; he may have followed that hollow down there and crossed on over."

He pinched out his cigarette, got to his feet stiffly and again moved onward. It was easier going now. The moon helped him and in a little while he was making better time than he had from the start. He moved down the long slope to the base of the knoll, up the longer slope to the crest of the ridge.

He stood there a moment, leaning on his rifle, looking down into the shallow valley before him. And then, suddenly, he found a thing he had not hoped to find tonight. It was the bright steady light which must be a camp-fire a long way off, and yet which looked like the glow of a candle!

"If I'm gettin' dippy already," he grunted, "I've sure got a tough night's work cut out for me!"

For even as he looked at it the light was gone, clean gone, as if it had been what it seemed, a candle burning down there in the valley, and suddenly lost to him because it was in a house and the door had shut.

"There isn't a house in fifty miles of me and I know it!" he told himself wonderingly. "It looks like I'd better cut out loafin' and head on straight to water while I know what I'm doin'."

And yet he waited. Still his eyes clung to the spot where they had seen the light. It was very dark down there. A clump of trees or a tall, upstanding mass of rock, he could not tell what it was, made a pool of inky blackness, shutting out the moon.

He drew a little to one side, keeping his body in the shadow of a rock there, squatting down, and still watched and waited. There came to him no sound, no further light gleamed at him to tell that he had not fancied the thing which he had thought that he had seen.

There was only one way to know. He must go down and find out. It was quite possible that he had seen a small camp-fire; that it had been builded by the man who had fled before him; that the man had masked it behind a saddle-blanket. If he went down he would have to step out boldly into the moonlight. There would be little hope of keeping hidden.

And yet, realizing that, he saw every reason to go down into the valley. For a man might be there, and that man might be the man who had shot Dancer, and that man might be Crag Verilees. It was possible. And also, if there were a man there, there would be water. It was a chance and he took it.

WALKING swiftly now, he made his way down the slope. He estimated that the light he had seen in the shadows was a mile away. So now he made no attempt to conceal his hastening body, stepping out where the way was

Digitized by Google

easiest, until he had come down to the more level land.

He saw now that the spot toward which he was hastening was under a steep, bare fall of rock, and that it would be half an hour before the moon rose high enough to drive the shadows out.

It was perhaps half a mile away. He would go more slowly now, not giving the man, whoever he might be, a second chance for cowardly shooting.

He saw a deep-cut gorge running in the general direction which he was traveling and planned to drop down into it for the scant protection which it gave him. Then he would stop after a little and again wait for the moon.

But not yet was Babe Deveril's caution sufficient to his need. It was not his way to think over much of the chances he was taking; it was his way to go straight after the thing he wanted.

For the second time that night the unexpected crack of a rifle broke the deep silence. For a second time Babe Deveril gave quick leaden answer, glimpsing the flash of the gun not fifty yards away from him where, as before, a man had crouched behind the rocks.

He dropped down to his knee and fired again at the spurt of flame. But he was in the moonlight, the other was in the shadow; he did not see the man at whom he fired and the other could not fail to see him plainly. Another shot and Babe Deveril's rifle slipped from his hands and he went down on his face, a 30-30 Winchester bullet driven through his body.

The shock alone of a bullet hurled fifty yards from the muzzle of a 30-30, not taking count of the tearing through flesh and bone, the spilling of a man's blood from countless torn blood-vessels, is enough to knock a man down. Babe Deveril fell, with no brief space of time to feel pain, conscious of nothing but a blind, raging, speechless wrath. And from pain, shock and loss of blood consciousness of all things went out of him.

He did not know that a man came after a little and looked down at him; he did not know that the same man turned him over rudely with his foot and stooped and looked into his face. He knew nothing until he saw the moon low in the west and grown silver from the sun that had not yet crept upward above the ridge of eastern hills.

He knew then that he had been lying there for all these hours, that he had lost a great deal of blood, that he was weak and sick and in wracking pain, and that there was small chance of his ever riding out of this land into which he had come so recklessly.

He tried to rise and fell back with a groan forced through his white lips. He set his teeth hard and tried again. And again he fell back.

For a little he closed his eyes and lay very still, forcing himself to think clearly, striving to remember just where it was that he had been hit. One moment he felt that he had not a drop of blood left in his body; the next he wondered if his head were full of blood, it drummed so in his ears and roared and seemed to be on the verge of bursting out. His sickness grew greater, his strength less, and he fainted.

AGAIN consciousness came to him. The moon was paler; it looked sick, and he fancied that it was faint like himself. The sun would come up in a little and then it would be very hot and the heat would kill him. His throat burned and ached feverishly now. He wondered if he would die more from lack of water than because of his wound.

There came to him the strange temptation, for temptation it was, to close his eyes again, to lie back and give up and die and have done with it all. And then, because he was a man, because he had loved his horse, and because he had sworn to find Crag Verilees, he strove again to rise.

Now he found the wound, for now it pained him sorely. It was in his side. The heavy bullet had torn its way in and out, inflicting a painful flesh wound, causing injuries at which he could only guess vaguely.

He managed to grasp a rock and pull himself up against it so that he was half sitting, half lying, his back at last to the rock. He found his knife and cut his shirt away.

He slashed strips from the shirt, tied them end to end with shaking fingers and bound them tight about his body, doing what little he could to hold a little blood in his emptying arteries. And then, leaving his rifle where it lay because it was too heavy for him to manage now, and bringing a heavy Colt revolver from his hip and holding it before him on the ground, he began to crawl toward the spot where he had seen the light.

Digitized by Google

The sun came up and found him less than half way. He could not stand, and the uneven ground shut out his view so that he could see only a few yards ahead of him.

He crawled a little and lay still, fearing that the heat of the sun would kill him before he could go the short distance he had determined to travel. The world swam before him and went black, the insistent drumming in his ears louder, his strength less and less, and still he fought his way on, inch by inch.

More than once his weakness and pain and sickness all but overpowered him, and the temptation to the overworked, wounded body to lie still and die became almost an imperative command. And still he edged on, inch by inch, like a wounded snake. He had little hope; he expected from each slight rise to look ahead and see the smouldering ashes of a last night's camp-fire, and nothing else. No water, no man, no horse; only that to tell him that a man had been here last night and that he was still twenty miles from water.

Higher and higher climbed the sun, its rays warming swiftly, burning into his back now. An hour, two hours, three hours dragged by. He did not know how many times consciousness had gone out of him, he could not tell how long he had lain still, his face in the dirt. But he remembered Dancer even when he felt his brain whirling away from him in delirium; he spoke aloud over and over, repeating a promise, and he remembered Crag Verilees.

And because he was young and his spirit was the spirit of a fighting man, because his father and mother and the life he had led had given to him a body that died hard, he came at last to a little knoll from which he could look down to the place toward which he was slowly journeying.

Long, long he fought his way up that rise which would have been imperceptible to him yesterday, lying still very often with his face sidewise, cheek down, on the rough rocky soil, too tired to care. But at last he came to the top.

He saw the low, cliff-like hills just before him, saw a small dugout, part stone, part log and part dirt, leaning against the cliff; saw some one standing before the little door looking toward him. He drew his hand across his dimming eyes to look again. And when he saw that it was a girl, that the sun was in her hair making soft glories of it, that she was like some radiant maiden of the dawn, he groaned and dropped his head again and gave up.

He was sure now that he had come to the end of all things for Babe Deveril. This thing was impossible, and he had gone mad from the torture of the long night and dragging morning.

Such is the way in which Babe Deveril and Marian Ellston met for the first time.

VII

JUST as there are countless dim trails leading down into the black shadows of death, so are there numberless rosy paths leading back from the darkness into the light. Babe Deveril came back when in a little more his spirit would have slipped forth from his body through the gates already swinging open for it into the vastness of the unknown; came back and felt life still pulsing through him, consciousness growing clear, mists dying out of his brain, hope sweetening the breath he drew painfully into his lungs.

There was much that would have been hard for him to understand, but he did not care to understand and did not try. He was content that things were as they were, quietly ready to accept them and to ask no questions.

He lay on his back, and there was a roof over him and some sort of a rough bed under him. At his side was an old, rickety box that had been made into a table by the simple expedient of placing it on end and throwing a neck-scarf over it. A tin can with rough edges where a knife had opened it was half filled with water, and a little spray of wild flowers made a vase of it and spoke of a woman.

His wound pained him; he felt it with shaking fingers and knew that his rude bandage was gone and that another, fitting close, had taken its place. He saw a rifle in a corner of the small room and knew that it was his own. He saw that his Colt lay just by his hand on the bed.

He lay very still. It was very early morning or very late afternoon, he could not tell which. He did not care to tell which. No single bit of curiosity had come into his awaking mind. His mind was too completely filled with contentment with things as they were to have in it room for anything else.

Digitized by Google

Somewhere, not very far from him, was the girl who had kept the little flickering, dying fire alive in him. He knew now that he had not been mad when he had thought he saw her standing before the dugout. But even about her and her presence here where a woman had never come before, he felt no wonderment. She would come in after a little and he would try to thank her and she would take care of him.

In a moment she did come in. Evidently she had been standing just outside of the dugout, at the door, and had heard him stir as he felt of his bandage.

She came quickly to his bedside and stood there eagerly looking down into his upturned eyes. He saw how gray her eyes were, how tender now, and anxious and solicitous, and for the first time a little wonder crept into his brain, side by side with the contentment which had grown with sight of her—wonder that a girl so delicately, daintily lovely, should be here in a place like this.

"You are better!" she cried softly. "And you are going to live after all! Thank God!"

"I am goin' to live after all," he repeated weakly. "Thank God, or thank you? You have been very good to me——"

"Sh!" she admonished him. "I am doctor and head nurse and—and I believe that the thing to do is to make you lie very still and talk very little."

"Then," and Babe Deveril smiled up into her grave face in the way that helped gain him his name in the cattle country, "I am goin' to obey orders. But I'm goin' to thank you every single time I get the chance, all the rest of my life."

He saw that her face was pale, and he was sure that her face should not have that pallor nor that drawn look; he saw that her eyes were tired and that there were little dark lines under them. He knew that while he had slept she had stayed awake watching over him.

"I'm sorry I'm so much bother," he told her contritely.

"You're not bother," she answered quickly. "You mustn't say so, you mustn't think so. I—don't you see that I was so dreadfully lonely that I was glad to have some one here, something to do?"

"Then—" wonderingly—"you are here all alone?"

"Yes."

He remembered now the footprints he had seen way back there by the water-hole: tracks made by a man and a woman. He glanced down quickly to see if she wore a boot which would have left the small, deep-heeled impression. He glanced up then, back into her eyes. There had been a man with her then. He had thought that it might have been Crag Verilees.

"You have not been alone—long?" he asked.

"No. But you are talking too much!"

"Please," he insisted. "Just a few words and I'll be good. Where is the man who was with you?"

She hesitated, and then to humor him answered:

"He has gone to White Rock for some supplies. I—I am going to stay here for a while.

That was strange, strange that she should send for supplies to stay in a place like this. But his mind went back to the thing which he must know.

"What kind of boots did he wear?" he asked abruptly.

He saw her eyes darken, saw a swift alarm in them, and understood before she could speak that she was afraid that he was going back into his delirium.

"I have let you talk all I'm going to now," she returned with an emphasis that was very positive. "You can lie still and watch me, but you must not talk unless you want something."

She left his side with the last word and went to the little fireplace he had not noted. She built a small fire of dry branches and bits of a rotting log, and set a couple of tins of water close to the hearth. She was going to prepare a meal. Breakfast or supper? He began to be interested in things now. He would not ask her, he would watch her preparations and watch the slowly moving shadows by the door.

In a moment she went out to return with some fresh meat in her hands, fresh meat here in the Bad Country! He saw that it was his pocket-knife which she used to cut the meat into small pieces. She was making broth, broth for him, perhaps. And so far as he could see that was all that they were going to have for—breakfast or supper.

Then he saw that the shadows were thickening, that it was late afternoon, and night was drawing near. She poked up her fire so that the room lighted with it, and passing his bed smile at him and said:

Digitized by Google

"I have a piece of candle, but we'll save that. Is there anything that you want?"

"I'd like to get up and help," he smiled back at her. "If you won't let me do that, I'd like to talk."

"You mustn't be foolish," she scolded him. "I'm going to be very dictatorial with my first patient. You are going to have some broth made out of nice, young deer meat, soon. You can have a drink of water now if you want it."

She brought it to him in a small can. It was cool and sweet, and though it welled through the hard crust of this desert land there was no taste of alkali in it. She slipped her arm under his shoulder and helped him rise a very little so that he could drink.

When he had thanked her and she had again cut his expression of gratitude short, he said:

"If you won't let me talk, talk to me, won't you, please? Tell me how you got me here—all about the trouble I've been."

SO AS she came and went or stood by his side she told him. She had been at the door, just going for her horse to ride back in the little valley where there was shade and some water and game to be found, when she had seen him lift his head from the ground and look at her. She was alone then, as Pete had already left for White Rock.

Pete! He wanted to ask her who Pete was, if Pete wore old boots, the heel pretty well gone from one, and if Pete carried a 30-30 Winchester. But she saw that he was going to speak, and lifting her hand against his question she went on and he waited until another time.

He had shocked her so when she had caught that first glimpse of him crawling toward her that for a moment she could not move, could not go to him. She saw him lift his head and then fall back fainting. She was afraid that he was dead. But in a second she knew that he was alive and that she must hasten to his assistance.

She had found him unconscious, every muscle of his body relaxed and useless, save alone the muscles of his right hand. The fingers were tight about the grip of his revolver and did not let go even when she struggled to get him to the dugout.

Yes, she did it alone. She brought water and wet his face and wrists; she made his white lips open and drink; she washed his wound and did what she could to bandage it rightly. Then she got him into the bunk-house.

It had taken a long time. She had been afraid that he would die before she could drag him that short distance. But at last she had done it, at last she had managed to get him upon the bunk.

That had been Tuesday morning. It was now Wednesday evening. For two days she had watched over him, helping him make his fight against fever and delirium and weakness from loss of blood. She had fed him broth, all that she had to feed him. She had given him water, and when he had struggled to rise she had held him down. Oh, smilingly, that had not been very hard; he had been as helpless as a kitten.

"Only at first," she told him, "I was worried about your revolver. You fought so hard to keep it always in your hand. You refused to be still or to sleep if I took it away, and I was afraid that you'd shoot yourself or me in a moment of your wild delirium."

He looked to his side and saw the gun there. She laughed softly, the first time he had heard her laugh.

"I took it away from you and removed the cartridges," she told him. "Then I gave it back and you have been quite content with it that way!"

"You don't know who shot me?" he asked.

She shook her head and he thought a little fear came into her eyes.

"No. I was alone here; Pete had already gone to White Rock. I did not think that there was another soul within many miles of our hiding-place!"

Hiding-place! It slipped out unconsciously, and he was quick to note it. She was in hiding, this lovely girl with eyes filled with frankness and kindness; she and a man named Pete were in hiding! Of what —of whom?

Then her can of broth on the coals boiled over and she had to run to it, and Babe Deveril lay still, thinking. And in a little while she brought him his "supper" and fed it to him, making him drink it, and asking him solicitously if he could manage to take just a little more and if he missed the salt and pepper terribly.

And after he had had his broth and lay back she forbade him to say a single word,

Digitized by Google

informed him that she would tell him nothing further until he had slept, and then made him want to get up and kiss her for being the sweetest, most thoughtful little girl in America. For she had brought him his tobacco and papers and had lighted his cigarette for him with a burning twig from the fireplace.

"You can smoke and watch me eat," she laughed then.

She had broth for herself and a venison steak which she broiled on the coals, promising him that if he were good he could have a steak himself tomorrow.

"Just one thing," he pleaded, after the first taste of smoke from his cigarette, "and I'll not say another word until you tell me I can."

"All right," she answered. "But remember, I shall keep you to your promise. And I'll promise you now that I'm not going to let you do any more talking until tomorrow morning. I'm rather afraid," doubtfully, "that I should not have given you a smoke! Now, what is it?"

"I have been out of my head so much," he said, "that I'm not sure of anything. But didn't I hear some sort of music?"

"You like music?" quickly.

"Then I was right? When I got pretty well unmanageable you quieted me by singing to me?"

Without answering him she finished her own meal and put the things away, having washed the tin cans with a bucket of water and set them to dry in the square opening which served as a window. Then she came again to his bedside.

"I don't play for everybody," she told him quietly. "I am going to play for you because I know that you do like music. When you just wouldn't behave I thought about it and played for you, and you would lie still and go to sleep."

She left him and went outside.

"She's goin' out to have a couple of men bring the piano in," he muttered, staring after her. "Oh, no, I'm not off my head again!"

But she came back almost immediately, her violin cuddled under her chin, her bow in her fingers, and Babe Deveril knew that he was not delirious and that, all things considered, with even a bullet hole drilled through him, he was a very lucky man.

"I've fired the doctor and nurse," he told her, "and have sent for the band! Let's have something lively. I feel like going to a dance!"

"What you are going to have," and as she drew the bow softly across the strings he knew that she could play, "is going to be something soothing. And you are going—to sleep!"

He sank back on his rude pillow and listened, and his thoughts went the way she wished them to go, following the hushed, tender notes of the violin in an old, old song which men of the cattle country and men of the cities know and love. He was very tired but very content.

His wound pained him, but again and again he forgot the pain in watching the musician through his half-shut lids, in listening to the soft singing of her instrument. He tried to feel ashamed of himself for all the trouble he had caused her, and he tried to be ashamed of feeling happy with her there, playing for him. She, too, was tired, very tired. While he had slept she had watched over him. He should not let her play for him; he should make her lie down and sleep.

And while he was thinking about it and his soul was following the tender harmonies he forgot to smoke, his cigarette went out, his half-closed eyes closed entirely, and he went to sleep.

When again he awoke, it was pitch dark in the dugout. The fire had burned to ashes on the hearth, the moon was hidden behind a bank of clouds, or behind the cliffs. It was intensely still. He listened, staring into the darkness, and after a little heard the low sound of running water somewhere outside.

He wondered what time it was, how long he had been asleep, where the girl was sleeping. There was only the one bunk and he had deprived her of that. Perhaps she had made a bed of branches with a saddle-blanket thrown over them, with a saddle for a pillow.

He found himself wondering who she was, telling himself that it was none of his business that she and a man named Pete were in hiding here, and yet asking himself over and over what sinister thing could have driven a girl like her to a place like this. He remembered the music of her violin, soft harmonious dream stuff that had soothed him and put him to sleep, remembered the tenderness of her eyes, the low music of her voice, and no longer tried to

Digitized by Google

shut out the question: "What is she doing here and who is she?"

She had saved his life for him and he knew it. But he did not know what her name was and she did not know his. For two days she had been everything to him. He thought, as his mind went the way a sick man's mind may go, that it would be happiness to be everything to a girl like her, and yet they were in all essentials still strangers to each other.

And he asked himself about Pete. Was he a husband, a brother? Was he a lover, and had their love story been in some way the reason of their flight? He was prepared not to like Pete, whoever he was! Was Pete the man who had shot him, who had killed Dancer? If not Pete, who then? And when would Pete come back?

She had emptied his revolver of its cartridges. He must see that she reloaded it for him. Suppose that when Pete came back it turned out that it had been Pete who had shot him? Then Pete would want to finish his work. He must not be utterly defenseless, unarmed as well as wounded. He must be able to defend himself and—what? Kill Pete? Kill the lover or husband, or brother or friend of the girl who had saved his life?

No, he could not do that. And it would not be necessary. For he began to reason calmly, to tell himself that since he knew no man named Pete it could not be Pete who had shot him. It must be Crag Verilees or Temlock or one of the men belonging to their lawless outfit.

But anyway, he must not be unarmed again. There was still danger to him; there might be danger to her. It was possible that Crag Verilees had been here, that he had shot him, and that the girl might herself be in danger of Verilees.

He grew thirsty, so thirsty that his throat burned him. And yet he would not call to her, would not break the sleep which she must need as badly as he needed rest. He had seen that she was nearly worn out.

He was tempted as the thirst raged higher and a touch of fever came with it, to slip out of bed and go outside to where he could hear the low music of running water. It was irritating him, angering him, to hear the water there and be thirsty. And yet his moving would wake her for she must be near, within hearing. So he lay still.

And then, remembering that she was the sort of girl he already knew her to be, he smiled, and in the darkness put out his hand to the box table at his elbow. And he found there the can of water she had remembered to put at his side for him.

He turned to one side, lifted his shoulders a little from his pillow to drink, and saw her. For the moon had slipped through the clouds and its rays showed her to him.

She was sleeping, her slumber untroubled like a child's, and she was lying near the door, just within the dugout, not five feet from his bunk. She had thrown down a saddle and saddle-blanket just as he had guessed, just as he had done himself so many, many nights out on the range, and with her head pillowed on the saddle, her brown hair about her face, her cheek cuddled into one arm, she had slipped out of the fatigue of the day into a dreamless rest.

He grew very still, leaning upon his elbow, looking down upon her. He forgot the pain of his wound, the fever of his thirst, and looked at her. The moonlight lay full across her face, and her beauty seemed to him the beauty of some dainty, fairy-like dream thing. She stirred a little and he was afraid she was going to awaken. Then the clouds shut out the moon, he heard a deep, sleepy sigh, and having drunk his water he lay back, his mind still full of her.

"She's a little thoroughbred," he told himself thoughtfully. And in a little, his eyes frowning, he added: "I pray God it wasn't Pete who shot me—and that he's just her brother after all!"

Whereupon he, too, went to sleep again.

VIII

THERE passed two days and nights which neither Marian Ellston nor Babe Deveril would ever forget. Strange days of solitude they were in a strange solitary land, days made bearable to each by the presence of the other. Deveril was a badly hurt man, and during those days the fangs of death were never far from his throat. And yet he found that in spite of the suffering which had to be his portion he was not unhappy.

He failed to see that a man, no matter what his trouble, could be utterly wretched with this girl near him day and night. And Marian, her bitterness of a few days ago by no means forgotten, her deep-cutting pain at the thing her father had sought to do, her sense of the precarious position into

Digitized by Google

which circumstances had forced her, was not unhappy. She had something to do which largely shut out thoughts of her own troubles and made them seem petty to her; she forgot her own pain in lessening Babe Deveril's physical torture.

They grew to know each other far better than people usually do under ordinary circumstances in many times two days. He told her his name and she remembered that she had heard of him from Stet Davis of the Wagon Wheel. He told her something of his life in the range-land to the south, something of his aims and hopes and ambitions. And she, glad for the opportunity of conversation, told him something of her own life.

They were no longer strangers. Each sensed in the other something with which he could sympathize. But Babe Deveril did not mention Crag Verilees, did not hint at the dark thing which had brought him here, and Marian Ellston did not speak of her father or of Temlock or of her own reason for seeking the protection of so menacing a thing as the Bad Country. A natural reserve kept each one silent upon this one point; a natural delicacy forbade any questioning upon it.

Although the girl told him her name, she did not mention the word "Ellston," for that name no longer belonged to her. She had dropped it and would have been glad if she could have forgotten it as readily. She called herself Marian Lee, as her mother had been named when a girl.

Now that she saw that her patient was not again in danger of delirium, she brought his cartridges back to him. A man had tried to kill him. She did not know who the man was or why he had fired those shots which she had heard and wondered at; but she did know that there might still be danger to him and that he had the right to be armed and ready. And many a long hour while Deveril lay on his bunk his fingers were close to the grip of his Colt, his eyes upon the narrow doorway, as he half expected to see Crag Verilees' lean, gaunt body shutting out the light, his wolfish eyes and cruel mouth sneering and triumphing and menacing.

"Pete should have been back before now," Marian had said more than once.

She had told him who Pete was, Indian Pete who had so long been one of her household in Hang Town, and Babe Deveril felt a deep satisfaction when he was able to feel certain that he should have no quarrel with friend of hers. And still he wondered if he had fallen from a bullet from Crag Verilees' rifle; if so, where Verilees was now, if he would come again, and if he knew of the dugout and Marian's presence there.

They lived on the meat Marian could bring into camp with her rifle. She rode two or three miles through the narrow valley to a grassy meadow, fringed with hardy timber, and there she found rabbits, quail and a few deer.

The second time she returned from her hunting she found Babe Deveril waiting for her at the door. He had slipped out of bed, managed to get his boots on, and made his slow, painful way to the threshold, where he sat leaning against the side of the door, smoking and waiting. He was very pale and she scolded him and drove him back to his bed. But after that he persuaded her that it was best for him to move about a little, that he was going to lose all of his strength if he didn't, and she gave in and allowed him to sit on a blanket in the sun a large part of the day.

But when he started one evening, toward dusk, to make up his bed on the ground outside, where of late she had been sleeping, and she found him carrying her blanket to the couch, he learned that his nurse, although she had given in a little, was still boss.

"Babe Deveril," she said severely to him, "I am ashamed of you! You dare to try play a trick like that on me again and I'll pack up and go!"

And he saw that she meant it and he apologized and gave up the attempt.

"You're just a wonder girl and that's all," he told her. "I wouldn't swap you for all the doctors and nurses in the world. And," this to himself, though he felt very much like saying it to her, "if you don't look out I'm goin' to get myself so tangled up in love with you that it'll be plumb hopeless!"

A man like Babe Deveril, young, clean-hearted, reckless and headlong and likable; a maiden like Marian Lee, dainty and frank and gloriously lovely; days alone in a land like the Bad Country, with tremulous dawns and soft star-set dusks, with the singing of the winds and of the water behind the dugout, the singing of her violin in the old songs she loved best and he loved best; long days of infinite stillness and infinite peace; long

Digitized by Google

twilights to mask the ugliness of the world and make of it a sort of dream-loveliness; long evenings filled with moon-glory and star-shine; and what is the answer? The old, old story, the "way of a man and a maid," the beginning of the endless. And the moon knew, the stars and the dawns and the dusks knew, and Babe Deveril and Marian Lee would have said that they were growing to be "real friends!"

"TELL me," he asked her once abruptly, his eyes searching and keen as they went to hers, "what sort of a place the valley is where you do your huntin'?"

"Why," she answered, seeing only a natural curiosity in his question, "it's a rather funny place to find out here. It's well watered, the hills fringing it are higher than most hills in the Bad Country, there's plenty of grass and a good many live oaks and pines."

"How big is it, this whole valley?"

"We're just on the edge of it. I should say it's three, possibly four miles long. At the widest places it is something like a half-mile."

"And—" he paused, frowning speculatively — "there's no signs of cattle anywhere in it?"

"Yes," she answered quickly. "I meant to speak of that. I was wondering about it. Do you suppose we're near some range on the north?"

"As far as I know there's not a range within seventy-five miles. There's nothin' to east, west or south but rocks and sand for more than that. On the north there is the Double Diamond and the LM[5]. They're a good hundred miles from here, or I'm off my trail. The nearest range of any kind is the Fryin' Pan, belongin' to Johnny Sanders. It's to the southeast and the handle of it runs a little way into the Bad Country. And the nearest part of that is seventy-five miles from here."

"Then," she wondered, "what cattle have pastured in here? There was a big herd here, and not longer ago than last Spring."

Babe Deveril seemed to lose interest in the conversation. He drew her attention to some minor matter and from it to anything but the consideration of the thing over which under all of his seeming indifference he pondered deeply all day. He wanted to be about more. He grew suddenly impatient for the return of his strength, for the time when he could walk or ride to the other end of the valley.

"It's open and shut," he told himself. "My good luck and bad have been pretty well mixed on this trip. I've found a girl that a man would be in luck to ride across a dozen Bad Countrys and find; and I've found the place Temlock and Crag Verilees run their stolen stock!"

He was very sure of it. He had known for a long time that Temlock was stealing cattle boldly and on a big scale; he had known that Temlock must have some place just like this one, where men would not look for it, to pasture his stolen cattle until such time as he could rush them to the railroad or on some long drive across country. Here was such a place, an ideal, unknown place, a safe place if once a man could get the stock across the dry, intervening country. And no doubt there was an easy trail somewhere with water-holes to make the drive possible.

"How did Indian Pete know of it?" he asked himself suspiciously. "Is this a prospector's cabin, or is it one of Temlock's camps?"

He was anxious not to have Marian know the things which ran through his mind. If this were a headquarters for Temlock and Verilees and their crowd, then it was no place of safety for her.

He already knew the girl well enough to feel positive that she was not the kind to take refuge in the fact that she was a woman, and so leave him here alone. He could not travel; she would not go. And until he could travel or until Indian Pete returned and matters simplified themselves and cleared to his understanding of them, there was no reason why he should alarm her. But after that he was more careful than ever to have both rifle and revolver close at hand, and to go to sleep at night with his trained mind ready to wake at the first little sound.

A week slipped by before Indian Pete returned. During the week Marian Lee and Babe Deveril had talked through very many quiet hours and had at last told each other something of their reasons for being here. She knew that he was looking for Crag Verilees and for Temlock—for Verilees particularly. She did not ask why and he did not tell her. But she understood more than they put into words, and she shuddered

Digitized by Google

when she thought of the thing that would happen when these two men met.

And he learned from her that it was because of Temlock that she had fled from her home and was now in the heart of the desert. She did not wish to mention her father, and she did not. So she went into no details concerning the trouble which had come to her. In some way Temlock was the cause of her fleeing from the beaten trail of men and women, and it was not hard for him to come close to an understanding.

THEN one day Indian Pete, leading a pack horse, came back. It was just after noon. Marian and Babe had lunched on their broth and broiled meat of which they were growing so heartily tired, and were in front of the dugout in the sun. It was Marian who first saw Pete and the horses.

Her glad little cry told Deveril. He turned with her and watched the Indian ride down the slope toward them. He was glad that the man had come, he could not help a quick spurt of frowning disappointment that the days of being alone were gone, and he found his eyes growing alert, eager, looking to see this man's boots before he saw his face.

"I'm a fool," he grunted. "Goin' and comin', I'm a blamed fool!"

Indian Pete rode down the slope and to the dugout at a slow jog-trot. He nodded to the girl, removed his hat, put it back and looked to Babe Deveril. In the stolid face of the Indian there was little expression, and yet a certain surprise was not gone before both Marian and Deveril saw it. Babe Deveril, looking at Pete's boots, saw that they were brand-new, not out of their box a week. Marian, looking at his face, laughed.

"I've got company you see, Pete," she called gaily. "And now give an account of yourself. Why have you been so long? And what have you brought to eat? If you knew how horribly sick we are of meat and broth, broth and meat——"

Indian Pete grunted his answer after his own brief way and rode on around the dugout to the spring. He drank first, thirstily, and then unsaddled and watered his horses. And already Marian's quick, eager fingers were at work with the pack-saddle.

"Canned things!" she announced joyously. "Tomatoes, think of that! And beans and sardines and peaches! Babe, Babe! Open it!"

She was like a child; he like a child, joining in with her in a new game. His heavy pocket-knife made light of the work of ripping its rough circular way through the top of the can, and for the moment, serenely forgetful of Indian Pete, nurse and patient made merry dessert of canned peaches. They ate with their fingers or with little bits of wood sharpened and smoothed and pointed by the same knife. They got the sirup all over their hands and faces, and altogether it was a red-letter occasion, not to be forgotten.

Indian Pete watered, fed and tethered his horses a couple of hundred yards from the dugout and then came to squat near them, his black eyes taking in every movement Deveril made. He made his cigarette and spoke briefly in answer to Marian's questions.

"Temlock, him in White Rock same time me. Him mad like ——! Think maybe I know where you are, maybe I go with you. Me—" he shrugged his shoulders after the white man's fashion—"me know Temlock got many, many eyes. Eyes in his own head like needles; eyes in Verilees' head; eyes in other men's heads scared of Temlock. Me wait one, two, t'ree day, wait for Temlock go 'way. Temlock gone, then me come back quick. That's all."

In a little, when he had rested and drunk several times at the spring, Pete took up a saddle-blanket and went to the shade of a little oak to lie down and sleep away the afternoon. Deveril looked up from the cigarette he was making and found Marian looking at him.

"Marian," he said quietly, "you'd better tell me all about this Temlock mix-up. I'm as good a friend as you've got, and you know it. If you've got a real, active enemy in Temlock you're goin' to need all the friends you've got. You know that, too, don't you? You've done so much for me, you'll only be playin' square to give me the chance to chip in on your side. Play fair, Marian."

Then she told him, told him everything that she could without speaking of the ignoble part her own father had played. And Babe Deveril's sunburned cheeks went a dark, angry red.

"Some day," he said quietly, as Stet Davis had said before him, "Temlock will get the wrong man!"

Digitized by Google

A THING happened that afternoon that might have been delayed a long time—that might never have happened—which altered the fates of at least three people, and occurred that day because Marian Lee was very sad.

God meant hers to be a sunny heart and she strove to do His will and be happy on each day He gave her. And yet hers was a small body in a big world, home had been lost to her, every-day things swept away, bitterness and sorrow planted deep in her bosom by the unthinkable thing her own father had done. It hurt her to think of him sunken to the depths in which she knew he lived; it hurt her to think that her own flesh and blood was criminal, weakly criminal; it hurt her more that he lied to her than that he took from a bank funds which were not his own; it hurt her most of all to know how he had made her mother suffer.

These things she strove to shut out of her mind, and for the most part she succeeded. But there were times, in the stillness of night, in the hush of Summer afternoon, when she could not drive them out.

Today her pain came upon her on the very heels of her light merry-making with Babe Deveril over a tin of peaches. Some light remark, some little thing, brought her back from the froth of bantering to the lees of a real trouble, the skeleton grinned at her out of its closet, and she grew suddenly quiet and a shadow chased the sunshine from her face.

She went into the dugout, took up her violin and with a faint smile to Deveril said that she was going off by herself to drive out her blue devils with bad music. Deveril objected that the devils would stay and she'd be draggin' all the angels out of Heaven besides to listen to her. But not even Babe's foolishness brought the smile back into her eyes.

"What for does a man want to go and make things wrong for a wonder girl like her?" Babe muttered savagely, as he watched her walking hastily away from the dugout.

In a little she was lost to him where the valley narrowed and the trees came trooping down to the bank of the little sluggish creek. And then because he had been awake early and had not gotten his strength back yet, and because there was nothing better to do now that his nurse had left him, he went into the dugout, made himself comfortable on his blankets and prepared to take a nap.

Half an hour later he waked suddenly from his light doze, brought rudely to consciousness by a sound so light that most men at most times would not have noted had they been awake. For he had grown in the habit of being always on guard, even in sleep, since he knew what the girl had to fear; since that was added to his own danger.

It was some one walking. He thought that it could not be Marian. She would not return before sunset. It must be Indian Pete. He lay quiet, listening, his eyes going swiftly to the open door.

New boots, to a man who wears his old pair until necessity and not vanity requires another pair, are apt to hurt the feet. If the man who has bought new ones has not cast away the old on a day like this, hot with blistering sun, he is apt to ease his feet by going back to the discarded footgear.

Indian Pete's boots had hurt him. As he lay on his blanket he had drawn them off to rest his feet. He had not cast away the old, but had brought them back into the Bad Country. He had them on now. Again almost before Babe Deveril saw the breed's face he saw his boots. And he raised up on his elbow, the hand at his side, ready.

He knew those boots, although he had never seen them until now, knew that the man who wore them was the man who had shot him, who had killed Dancer. For the heel of the right boot was gone; the heel of the left almost as good as new.

He lay very still, watching, waiting, ready. Indian Pete was at the doorway, his tread all but noiseless. He paused there and looked in. His rifle was across his arm. His eyes were black, inscrutable, the eyes of an Indian.

"Where Miss Marian?" he asked quickly as he saw that Deveril's eyes were open.

"She's gone up the valley," Deveril answered him quietly. "I guess you saw her go, Pete."

"Me 'sleep," grunted Pete. "See nothin'."

Then for a moment neither man spoke. Babe Deveril's right hand was hidden from the Indian, lying close to his side, the steady fingers already curved tight in the grip of his gun. It was not Babe Dveril's way to seek to hide the thing he thought, to loiter on the outskirts of what was to be done. Now his eyes were frankly distrustful, and

Digitized by Google

now he came straight to what was in his mind.

"What's the game you are playin', Pete?" he asked bluntly. "You killed my horse an' you —— near killed me. What's the game?"

Indian Pete's stolid face did not change. Not a muscle twitched; his eyes lost none of their fathomless blackness. His rifle, lying in the crotch of his left arm, the muzzle pointing downward and at a spot not two feet from where Deveril lay, the trigger feeling the steady touch of a finger of the right hand, did not move. He might have been an artist's conception in stone of his emotionless, treacherous race.

"What for you come here?" he asked suddenly.

"That, my beloved warwhoop," Deveril informed him quietly, "is none of your —— business."

For a long moment Indian Pete regarded him with thoughtful gravity. When he had spoken he had been a statue awaking to life; now he was the thing carved in stone again, not even the eyes moving as they rested upon the cowboy's, the narrowed eyelids unwinking. And then—it came with the unexpected swiftness of a flash of lightening from a black cloud—his whole being was galvanized into action.

He had leaped back so that even his shadow was gone from the threshold. He had in one bound sprung to the corner of the dugout and around it. Perhaps he had seen that Babe Deveril was ready, perhaps he had after all glimpsed the gun in the right hand. There came the crack of his rifle, not five paces away, and a 30-30 bullet tore its way through the rotten logs of the north wall and embedded itself in the floor six inches from Deveril's side.

"The son-of-a-gun!" grunted the cowboy.

He rolled over, his action as swift as the Indian's, despite the sore wound, and as he moved, in the short flash of time, decided the thing for him to do: the thing which Indian Pete would not be looking for. A second bullet, crashing through the wall before the splinters scattered by the first had stopped moving, found the spot where a moment ago Deveril's body had lain. Then came a third and a fourth, fired as fast as a quick man at the trigger could work the lever. But already Babe Deveril was at the door. He sprang outside.

They met there, face to face, hardly more than room between them for Indian Pete to use his rifle. The Indian heard him and swung about to meet him, his rifle thrown up, his hand jerking down the lever, the muzzle looking the wounded man squarely between the eyes.

One infinitesimal fraction of time, one brief part of a second so short that the finest stop-watch could not count it, was all that stood between Babe Deveril and death. And yet, to a man who uses his gun as swiftly, almost as naturally as his involuntary muscles work, it was time enough. Deveril fired, fired just as the lever snapped back into place, just as the Indian's finger hardened to the trigger, fired and threw himself to the side.

He felt the pain as of a hot iron laid along his temple and knew that a quarter of an inch and a bit of immeasurable time had saved his life to him; he saw Indian Pete stand balanced a moment, saw the rifle slip from his hands, saw him settle quietly and lie still, a bullet through his brain.

"I've kept my promise, Dancer," Babe Deveril said sternly.

He drew back to the door and sat down. Suddenly he was very weak, almost fainting. He put his hand to his temple and found that it came away red. But the wound there was nothing, a scratch which two days would heal. It was not that that weakened him. It was his old wound. He had broken it open with the quick leap to the door; the blood was gushing from it as freely as when it had first been made; he was fast growing weak, weak. . . .

And then, looking up he saw dim against the low sun, the form of a girl. She had come back. She was standing looking down at the quiet form of Indian Pete, looking from it to Babe Deveril, with strange eyes.

IX

"YOU have killed him!" Her voice crept through the roaring in his ears, as strange a thing as the look he saw in her eyes.

He saw her fingers go bloodlessly white as they tightened about the neck of the violin in her hand. It was a little hard for him to think clearly just then; he was thinking that her way had been hard enough with troubles aplenty as it was, and now he had killed a man who had befriended her and he had made her look upon death.

Digitized by Google

"I have tried to do all that I could for you," she went on when he did not speak. Her voice was steady and came more clearly now, and yet he was thinking that in a moment it would break pitifully and that she was going to be shaken from head to foot with passionate sobbing. "And now you have killed him—the only friend I had in all the world! Why did you do it?"

She had returned in a roundabout way, had come from the south side of the cabin and had not seen how Indian Pete had fired first. He wanted to tell her, but suddenly he felt too weak, too sick and uncertain of his voice to say anything. So he sat and stared at her until the sun behind her blinded him.

And as he sat he swayed a little and felt the hot blood against his side where it broke from the slipping bandages, and his face went white, as white as Marian Lee's face. But she did not see these things, noted nothing but the dead face of Indian Pete and the horror of it all.

"If I were a man," and her voice came to him from far, far off, "I'd kill you. It is the thing I should do, even being a woman. But one thing I can do and will do: Kill me, too, Babe Deveril and make your bloody work complete, or I shall some day send you to the gallows for this thing you have done."

He saw her move, guessed that she had gone down upon her knees at the side of Indian Pete, and then he saw nothing at all, heard nothing, knew nothing of what happened. For he had slipped a little further sideways and the world had swum and gone black as he slipped and fell, head and shoulders across the narrow threshold and fainted.

"I will let him die," Marian told herself with a steady little voice which was as strange in her own ears as it had been in Babe Deveril's. "I will somehow bury Pete, poor, poor old Pete—and——"

And then she broke down, the tears came, her slender young body shook in the gust of her weeping and she lay still upon the ground near the body of the man who had accompanied her into her exile.

The sun went its way low, lower in the western sky, until it flattened like a molten ball upon the long horizon, lower still until only a glowing section of the red rim winked across the little valley, and the three figures lay so still that had a man come here now he must have thought all three dead.

Then Marian moved a little as the dusk came on and sat up and moaned as her white face went back into her cold hands.

"Is there nothing left in the world but misery and wickedness and things like this?" she moaned. "Have men gone mad and drunk on crime? And I had begun to think——"

She broke off, shivering. It was warm and close in the new dusk but she seemed chilled. Her wet eyes went to Indian Pete's face and lingered there, widening with horror, drawn to the thing she shuddered to look at. Then they went to Babe Deveril. He lay as he had fallen and did not move. She wondered if he were dead?

"It would be only right," she told herself bitterly. "And I shall do nothing—I shall let him die!"

It was a horrible thing, but less horrible it seemed to her hot brain than to seek to keep the life in a murderer. She had not reasoned, she could not reason now. She knew only that Babe Deveril had killed Indian Pete.

It was growing dark. Suddenly the girl leaped to her feet, a new horror upon her. She could not stay here, she could not remain all night at the side of a dead man and of the man who had killed him. It would drive her mad. But she must stay. She could think clearly enough to know that. She could not go away and leave them like this. She must stay!

She hurried into the dugout, drawing her skirts back so that she might not touch the cowboy where he lay. She went hastily to the fireplace and with shaking fingers piled faggots and splinters of wood, building a fire. She must at least have light if even the unstable, ghostly, fancy-filled light of a camp-fire.

The dry, burning wood, filling the cabin with light, threw a ruddy gleam out across the two sprawling bodies. She came out again, again drawing aside so that she might not touch Babe Deveril. And she did not look at his face. Far off she heard the shrill, shuddering, evil bark of a coyote.

She, she alone, a young girl, must find some way to make a grave, must bury a man. A weakness, a growing nausea not unlike Babe Deveril's swept over her. Her taut nerves jangled. At a little sound she started and her white face went whiter.

And suddenly an unreasoning alarm

Digitized by Google

leaped out upon her: Temlock was still looking for her! Suppose that he had followed Indian Pete after all; that he should come upon her now.

THE firelight played fitfully over Indian Pete's still body. It seemed to her disjointed fancies that one long, quivering finger of fire pointed, wavered, pointed again. Pete lay upon his back. His arms were outflung, his open vest fell to right and left of his body. The trembling finger of her firelight touched and rested a moment upon a white, folded paper in Indian Pete's inside vest-pocket.

In this way the thought first came upon her: If she buried this man she must first look through his pockets. Indian Pete had a sister in Hang Town, a dissolute, half-breed woman with whom Marian had never spoken. But there might be something in the Indian's possession which should go to his sister. At any rate it would be her duty to see.

The fire flickered and danced, gave way to shadows and flared out again as wood fires do, and the folded paper in Indian Pete's pocket still peeped out at her. It was strangely white and clean and new to be a thing belonging to Indian Pete.

While her fancies wandered, still that fresh, unsoiled bit of paper drew them back over and over to the stern work that her fate had set before her. With a sudden gesture, half of pity, half of revolt, she stooped forward and drew it from the Indian's pocket. Moving a little closer to the open door, unfolding the paper, she read the few words in the big scrawl without trouble. The trouble came in understanding what was so plain, in forcing her hot brain to conceive of a thing so inconceivable.

"God! God!" she moaned. "That You let such things be!"

Here are the words of the brief, penciled note:

"HENERY LEHR: Pete's did his part like he promissed me and Ellston. He has got the girl safe al right. You know where. Pay him one hunderd dols."

And it was signed with the one name in big, bold letters—

"Temlock."

"Pete's did his part like he promised me and Ellston!" She read it over again to make sure that her brain had not tricked her, read it aloud in a voice which choked and which she could not make clear. "He's got the girl safe!"

The cold chill clutching her heart grew into ice. She had never asked herself in her blind trustfulness how it happened that Indian Pete had overheard so much of Temlock's and her father's conversation. Now she knew.

For a hundred dollars he had done this thing; and Temlock might even now be riding across the desert toward her, might be a mile away, half a mile, a hundred yards away! Pete had been gone a week. He had said that it was because he was throwing Temlock off the trail. And it was because he had been looking for Temlock to tell him where she was, and to get his order on Long Henery for a hundred dollars!

She stood dazed, uncertain. She did not know what to do, where to turn. Was the world filled with trickery and deceit? Was there no one whom she could trust?

The moon, at the full now, thrust a glorious, golden rim above the low, jagged line of the eastern sky. And the moon answered her. She had watched it rise last night with Babe Deveril. She had believed in him. She had thought, "There is a man; and under the manliness of him there lies the gentlemanliness!" A moment ago she had called him "murderer!" Why? Because he had killed a man?

Her brain was clearer now. She remembered that there had been other shots fired, the shots of a rifle. She had heard them first, snapping like linked firecrackers into the silence of the night. It had been Indian Pete who sought to do murder—and she had drawn her skirts away from Babe Deveril, and had left him to die—had hoped that he would die!

"God forgive me!" she gasped. "God forgive me!"

She sped back to the door. She went down on her knees there, her white hands flying to Deveril's face, seeking the wound that had stretched him out so still and pallid. It was not burial of the dead which she must look forward to tonight, it was care of the living.

She saw the streak of blood across his temple and her heart stopped beating as she thought that already he was dead. But in a breathless moment of bending low over him, so low that her hair and his met, she saw that here was only a scratch which had nearly ceased bleeding.

Digitized by Google

It was the old wound. A short search told her that. She drew him in a little further across the threshold, shut the door, forgetting the man lying outside, threw a blanket to the floor and got Babe Deveril's head and shoulders on it. And then, her fingers steady at last and very, very gentle, she again cut at his clothing with his own knife and laid bare the red wound in the white side.

She bathed it, bandaged it once more, bathed his head and wrists and in a little while drew him back to consciousness. His eyes flew open and regarded her searchingly.

"I had to do it, Marian," he whispered. "I'm sorry——"

"Sh!" she commanded very softly. "Lie very still—and get well, Babe Deveril. I need a friend, oh, more than you know. I need you to get well."

There is one thing which will shorten the longest night, soften the hardest blow that fate knows how to deal, one thing which Pandora let flutter out of the golden box and whose wings have never grown less rosy and radiant than when the fair mischief-maker turned many ills and one great good loose to roam the world—just Hope. Hope, soaring high in Marian Lee's heart that Babe Deveril was goin to get well, that he was going to be the friend her destiny called for, that he and she were going to ride free of the shadows and mystery and threat of the Bad Country; hope in Babe Deveril's heart that one day she was going to care as he knew he already cared.

MORNING broke and Temlock had not come. Then and then only she told Babe Deveril of what she had found in Indian Pete's pocket. And when she asked him for it he gave her an account of how he had been attacked by Indian Pete. He told her, too, of the boots, of the death of Dancer and of his certainty that it had been a bullet from Pete's rifle that had stricken him that other time.

"And you did not know each other?" she asked wonderingly. "Then why should he have shot you?"

Babe Deveril's face hardened.

"He was one of Temlock's men; one of Crag Verilees' men," he answered sternly. "He would have made another hundred dollars, perhaps!"

"Tell me—" for now she could no longer keep from her lips the question that had so long been upon the tip of her tongue—"why are you looking for Crag Verilees?"

Deveril was sitting propped up against the wall, looking out across the valley that was filling with sunlight. She saw his lips close tight, saw something in his eyes that drove a quick, unreasoning fear into her. The hand at his side tightened.

"It's not a pretty thing to talk about, Marian," he answered her slowly. "And talkin' about it can't help much. I've just got to keep on lookin' for him until I find him. And then——"

"And then?" she insisted.

"Then," sternly, "it's goin' to be nothin' new much. Just man and man, and quick, straight shootin'."

"Oh!" she cried hotly. "Why do you men do these things? If Crag Verilees has done something, if he has committed crime on top of crime, then why not seek that redress which all men may have? Why don't you call in the law?"

"The law?" He interrupted her there and she saw that a fierce light burned in his eyes which she had never before seen in a man's eyes. "The law? There is no law here, Marian, no law which is tireless and sleepless, which will bring a man like Crag Verilees to justice, except what men who live hard and die hard call the red law—the law of a man's right hand, the law there is no bribin'. And now—" his old smile came back into his eyes—"let's forget it and have some coffee."

That day Marian Lee and Babe Deveril buried Indian Pete. Babe's strength came back to him wonderfully, or at least he succeeded in convincing the girl that it did. For he had made up his mind to get this thing over with and he wanted to spare her all he could.

Then they were to get out of this hidden valley. For already Temlock knew, and Temlock might even now be riding toward them. And he could not tell whether Temlock would be riding alone or whether he would have a dozen of his crowd at his back. And the danger was not Babe Deveril's danger, it was hers. He could delay his meeting with Crag Verilees; it would keep. But he must not delay the time of her departure.

When she would not listen to his plan he strengthened his argument by simply saying:

"We've got to do it. It won't kill me to ride seventy-five miles. We'll make it to Johnny Sanders's place in two days. If we

Digitized by Google

stayed here what chance would I have, hurt like this, against the gang that travels with Temlock?"

And when he told her what he had guessed, that this was the place where Temlock and Verilees hid stolen cattle, that at any time they might appear, driving a stolen herd, she accepted his plan, half reluctant, half eager. And that same day, Marian upon her mare, Lady, Babe riding Indian Pete's mustang and leading the pack-horse, they left the valley and headed south across the Bad Country.

"We're goin' to get to Johnny Sanders' place in two days," he had told her. And to himself he had said, as he turned slowly in the saddle and looked back upon the dug-out where he had suffered so much pain and found so many happy hours, "I'm goin' to get well real soon. And then—then I'm comin' back. Because now I know where to find Temlock—and Crag Verilees!"

X

FIFTEEN minutes after they rode into the Sanders corrals, Marian Lee felt that she was in her own home where she had been born, raised and loved. For Mary Sanders, whom the boys from ranges many miles distant never thought of calling anything but "Mother Mary," took the girl into her round arms and into her heart at the same moment.

"You poor little motherless thing!" she cried softly. "You jus' come to Mother Mary an' the very firs' wicked man as shows his face aroun' the ranch to pester you is goin' to get it slapped clean off'n him."

It had been late in the afternoon when Babe Deveril and Marian Lee had come to the Frying Pan outfit. Johnny Sanders, himself, a little, weazened, brown man whose hair was beginning to thin on top and turn gray at the ends, was at the stable and saw them coming. He came down to the corrals to meet them, and the girl who had heard much of Johnny Sanders from Deveril felt a quick disappointment in the man. His face was hard. There was something in his eyes that spoke of sternness and relentlessness, bitter and a bit menacing.

"Hello, Babe," he said colorlessly. "Get down an' throw your stock in the barn."

He did not touch his hat to her; he did not seem to have seen her. He did not put out his hand to Deveril. He chewed at a fresh straw and gazed with thoughtful keenness at the cowboy's white face.

"Hello, Johnny," Babe returned with a trifle more cordiality. "We're stayin' a day or so if you don't care. This is Miss Lee."

"Howdy," said Sanders in the same indifferent voice.

The sound of voices brought Mary Sanders hurrying out of the house and down to them. But before she had dried her hands upon her apron a man had heard, too, and came with swift long strides out of the barn. He stopped dead in his tracks when he saw who it was. A quick light of pleasure shot up into his eyes and his face reddened a little under the tan.

"Why, it's Mr. Davis!" cried Marian joyously.

She had slipped from the saddle and put out her two hands to be engulfed immediately and heartily in Stet Davis'.

"Hello, Stet," Babe called after a second.

He was glad to see Stet, and yet—well he was glad that Marian was with friends, too. Only he felt that if she hadn't been quite so obviously pleased . . . .

"Hello, Babe," Stet answered, his face still hotly flushed. He had surrendered Marian to Mary Sanders who pushed him aside and took motherly charge of her from that moment. "You're quite some ways off'n the Two Bar-O."

"Not much further than you're off of the Wagon Wheel," laughed Babe.

He, too, slipped from the saddle, now taking a step toward Stet Davis, his hand out. But he swayed a little and his white face grew whiter, and he stepped back unsteadily and clutched at his horse's mane.

"What's the matter, Babe?" Stet cried sharply. "Hurt?"

Deveril nodded. Stet came to him quickly and ran his arm about the other's body, walking with him across the corral to a box upon which Deveril dropped weakly. Johnny Sanders, chewing quickly and hard at his straw, followed and stood looking down at him, waiting for the answer.

"You look like you'd been drawed through a tight hole an' drove back again," he grunted. And then lifting his voice sharply he shouted: "Mary! Get some coffee on an' see if I got a shot of whisky lef'. Babe's shot up, I reckon."

"Run acrost Crag Verilees?" asked Stet Davis quickly.

"No. But one of his crowd, a breed called

Digitized by Google

Indian Pete. Give me the makin's, Stet. I'm clean out."

Stet produced the tobacco and papers, his eyes frowning solicitously as they rested on the Two Bar-O man's drawn face. Johnny Sanders gazed at Babe a moment in silence, grunted and led the three horses into the barn.

"Herd Babe on up to the house," he called back to Stet over his shoulder. "Sling a jolt of whisky in him an' keep the fire goin' for coffee. I'll be up in a minute."

"Injun Pete?" demanded Stet incredulously. "You mean he's one of the Temlock-Verilees bunch?"

"He—was!" Babe assured him calmly as he rested and drew gratefully at his cigarette.

"You ol' son-of-a-gun!" Stet cried joyously. "I always knowed he was crazy as a Injun oughta be, but I never guessed he had gumption enough to go stirrin' you up! Tell me about it."

So Johnny Sanders watered and fed the horses he had unsaddled and came out of the barn, Mary Sanders and Marian Lee went to the house and got into each other's way getting the coffee on, and still Deveril and Davis were in the corral talking. For, when Babe had told his story as briefly as he knew how, Davis had his to tell.

Word had got about that Marian Ellston had disappeared from Hang Town on the night of the dance. It had been three or four days before any one worried, because Ellston had answered questions put to him and had said that his daughter had gone to Rocklin to visit friends.

But when Stet Davis had heard that she was gone a quick fear that all was not right with her leaped into his mind. He had had the last dance with her; he had taken her home and she had said nothing about a trip. That was one thing. Another was that she had promised to let him call and he knew that it was not her way to do a thing like that. He had come into Hang Town as fast as a horse could carry him and lost no time in finding Ellston.

Ellston had said again that she was in Rocklin. Stet Davis had looked him straight in the eye and had made him say it over again. He asked him bluntly the name of the people with whom she was staying and Ellston gave the name of Larkins. Now it happened that Stet Davis had no use for the Larkins and knew that Marian did not know them at all. For he had once mentioned them to her and she had surprised him by asking who they were.

This had been enough to set Stet Davis riding day and night on the trail. He knew that her father was a "little crook," and that he was "as thick as horse thieves with Temlock." He was worried. He threatened Ellston and had regretted it as soon as the first heat of his rage had cooled. For he had gained nothing and had let Ellston know that he was on the lookout for a crooked deal of some kind.

But he had forced his way into Ellston's house, driving the man ahead of him with a threatening "forty-five" and had found that Marian's violin was gone. That brought him his first surge of hope for her; she had had time to take that with her and had taken her rifle too. And Lady was missing from the stable.

Marian had ridden away, perhaps alone. But why? Had something happened just after she left the dance, just after he had told her good morning? He couldn't explain it; he could only ride from one end of the country to the other, looking for her or for some sign of her passing. He had ridden to Rocklin and had drifted this way to the Frying Pan. He had never thought of her riding straight into the Bad Country.

"When I firs' saw you two," Stet ended a bit sheepishly, "my firs' bet was I was a fool all along an' she'd run off an' got married to you! An' then," with a deep breath, "I knowed better!"

For a moment the two men looked into each other's eyes searchingly. And then both men dropped their eyes to their cigarettes. They were very silent as they went with Johnny Sanders to the house.

BUT they could not long remain silent in Mother Mary's kitchen. She was not the merry-hearted little woman to tolerate so sinister a thing as silence in her domain. She clattered away as she poked the fire and looked at the coffee and brought the whisky bottle. She scolded Babe for getting shot, Marian for not having come to her long years ago, Stet for sitting on the wood-box when she wanted to get a piece of wood, and Johnny for not having reminded her to fill the lamp.

And they all brightened and warmed under her scoldings and obeyed her meekly in all things and loved her for being a chatterbox on the surface and a sweet, soft-hearted

Digitized by Google

woman under it all. Marian felt a quick suspicion that even hard-eyed little Johnny Sanders loved her and had to struggle hard to conceal his constant wonder and admiration for the woman who had consented some twenty odd years ago to accept his name.

"Injuns is jus' like grasshoppers," announced Mother Mary, bringing her flushed face up from an investigation of the mysteries of a piping hot oven. "Good Goddlemighty can't tell which way they're goin' to jump nex'. Stet Davis, ain't you got no nose? Can't you smell them steaks beginnin' to burn, an' you settin' right square on top the stove! Johnny Sanders, ain't there no place for you to stan' in but you got to plant them hoofs of your'n plumb center in the middle of the floor an' make me chase aroun' you ever' time like I was dancin' a Maypole!

"Babe Deveril, you set still! If I want a bucket of water I can pick it up without you gettin' in the way, can't I? Hmf. You men folks—Miss Marian, if the time ever comes when you think of marryin' some fool man, you jus' come tell Mother Mary. She'll so dratted soon make the brute a pie with squirrel pizen inside he'll— Johnny, give Babe there a little sip more of whisky. He looks whiter'n a sheet. Folks would say you was savin' it for yourse'f! Marian, you jus' leave that table alone! Johnny'll give me a han'. He's jus' gettin' in the way anyhow——"

And so it went, with Mother Mary like a whirlwind for activity and monologue, until the supper was ready and the oven had disgorged its crisp, brown secrets. And then the supper itself on the long table in the dining-room, where Mother Mary presided over the coffee-pot and dessert, leaving the distribution of the thick, dripping steaks to Johnny's brown hands, but superintending even that duty as she commanded him not to expect a young girl like Marian or a boy like Babe with a bullet hole through him to enjoy a piece of sole leather. Mostly, tonight, her mother heart, warm always and big and tender, went out to the girl who was motherless.

"I ain't worryin' about you, Babe Deveril," she told him severely. "You're jus' like the res' of 'em, rampsin' aroun' lookin' for trouble. Gettin' shot up once in a while does you fellers good."

But when it came to the pie—and there one might judge Mother Mary much more correctly than by the things she said—the brownest, most succulent bit went to Babe Deveril, and she contented herself by giving Marian the "secon' bes'."

And two or three times, when she got up hurriedly and went quickly to the kitchen upon some errand not clear to those at table, she merely went behind the door and dabbed at her eyes with the hem of her apron. For the mother heart was a hungry heart—when there were many at table she always missed the absent one the more—and when she mothered other women's boys and girls she longed so to mother her own.

"Where's Charlie, Johnny?" Babe asked early in the meal. "I haven't seen him for quite a while."

Johnny Sanders's stern face grew sterner, his mouth hardened. But before he could answer Mary Sanders spoke for him, a bit hurriedly.

"Jus' rampsin' aroun' like all young boys," she said bravely. "He's up to the Arrow now, punchin' with Emmet Wood. He—he'll show up tomorrow, I reckon."

Johnny Sanders looked at her sharply.

"What are you talkin' about Mary?" he demanded roughly. "You don't know when you'll see hide or hair of the boy. He——"

"You shet right up, Johnny Sanders!" she fired back at him, her face flushed. "I say Charlie'll show up tomorrow! An' I know, don't I, bein' his mother? You men make me sick! You're always throwin' it into a boy if he cuts loose an' runs kinda wild a spell. You done it, didn't you, before a woman with some gumption got ahold of you an' toned you down a bit! An' I reckon Babe here an' Stet has hit the high places more'n once an' they got both feet on the groun' now, ain't they? You jus' leave Charlie alone."

But Johnny Sanders's eyes and mouth were hard, skeptical.

"I didn't know you'd heard from him, that's all," he said shortly.

"I ain't heard from him!" she retorted. "Stet! Can't you see you're jabbin' that pore girl clean off'n her chair with your elbow?" Stet grew red and lowered the elbow in question, and Mother Mary went on: "But even if I ain't heard from him, I know he'll be home jus' the same. Yes, if he had to ride across a dozen Bad Countrys, or walk for that matter, with a broken leg. I guess you've forgotten something, Johnny!"

Digitized by Google

Whereupon Johnny Sanders looked at her steadily a moment, then questioningly. Then his eyes went swiftly to the calendar on the wall and he grew suddenly and deeply and redly embarrassed.

"I'd forgot, Mary," he said rather gently for him. "I kinda lost track of time."

Both Deveril and Stet Davis looked frankly curious; Marian sought to conceal the curiosity which was as strong in her. Mother Mary answered the unspoken question briefly.

"Tomorrow's my birthday," she announced a bit defiantly. "An' Charlie——"

But again she broke off to hurry to the kitchen, to disappear behind the door and to remain just a little longer than before. For fate that had been hard enough for Mary Sanders in many, many ways did not forget to be kind in one way that was big to her, and never yet had her boy forgotten to ride home for her birthday.

She had not seen Charlie for a year; she had not heard from him. But since evil news flies fast, she had heard of him and even her mother's heart which defended her boy staunchly knew that the things which she had heard were true. And yet tomorrow was her birthday, and the pies she would bake the first thing in the morning Charlie would eat in the afternoon.

When Mary Sanders came back from the kitchen, Babe Deveril had switched the conversation into a new channel by asking Stet Davis about the Wagon Wheel, the stock they were running, this and that man with whom he had worked on the ranges or at the big annual round-ups. And until the empty plates were pushed aside and chair legs scraped and the men lighted their cigarettes, there were many little silences falling.

Mother Mary strove to kill silence as was her religion and scolded at the slightest excuse, but for once she deceived nobody, and Babe Deveril forgot his wound, Marian Lee her trouble, in ready sympathy for a mother whose pain at childbirth had been the smallest pain her son had caused her.

"If he does come," Babe Deveril told himself as they went back to the kitchen, "I'm goin' to take him back to the Two Bar-O with me and pull him up short. He's on the wrong trail and goin' fast."

Johnny Sanders's home was one of the good old elastic kind that has a place for every man and woman and horse that requires shelter. That night Marian Lee was shown into a little room where everything was made cozy and comfortable, and where she was made to feel at home and to understand that she was to stay as long as she liked "me an' Johnny. An' don't you go' an' let Johnny's outside fool you, neither. He looks crusty as a horn toad, an' he's jus' the bes' man an' sweetes' husband in the world!"

Babe and Stet were given a bed together, and the low rumble of their voices continued indistinctly through the house until after the others had gone to sleep. For Babe and Stet were old friends and had much to ask and tell each other of the events of the many months since their trails had converged.

And Stet had news concerning Temlock and Verilees. At least he was sufficiently satisfied that these two were implicated to wager such small things on it as his next month's salary, his saddle-horse and hat. When a man is that confident there is a very strong likelihood of his knowing what he is talking about.

"It was the Roman IV outfit this trip," Stet said. "Close to a hundred big beef-steers gone slick as a whistle an' every one of the bunch worth eighty dollars, or I'm a liar. It happened this way:

"'Ches' Mann got laid up along with a colt buckin' saddle an' all into a pile of rock, an' 'Crazy Bill' Hancock got the job he's been hankerin' for for seventeen years as foreman. Ches was out'n his head an' flat of his back for close onto ten days, an' in that time Crazy Bill cut an awful wide strip of loco weed. He said it was all foolishness close herdin' like Ches was doin'; he called in a bunch of riders from the north end, said he reckoned the stock could roam free on the fringe of the Bad Country an' that was fence enough for anybody. He lef' one man up there to do the work of a dozen — 'Scotty' McLeish — you know Scotty, Babe?"

"Sure. A good scout and worth a dozen men, too, when it comes to a fight. What happened?"

Stet grunted.

"A fight," he said shortly. "An' Scotty'd 'a' made good on it, too, I reckon. Only they didn't give him a white man's show. Six or eight of 'em, Scotty didn't know how many, dropped out'n the Bad Country on that herd, like a flock of buzzards on a dead

Digitized by Google

steer. Only they come at night. Scotty woke up shootin' with both han's. But they got him an' it's nip an' tuck if he pulls through now. Doc Trip's workin' on him, givin' him horse liniment an' stuff."

"Did he get any of the rustlers?" demanded Babe.

"He don't know that even. It was too dark. He's sure he nailed one of 'em in the wing an' crippled him purty bad."

"Did Scotty know any of them?"

Stet hesitated and looked worried. Finally when he answered his voice was lowered so that Babe Deveril must lean closer to get the halting words.

"He ain't sure. That is, he wishes he wasn't sure, I guess, Babe. The fellow he shot in the shoulder wasn't much more'n a kid, nineteen maybe, sandy hair, loose jointed——"

"You don't mean——" began Deveril, his brows gathered, his tone as troubled as Stet's.

Stet shook his head and swore softly.

"Ain't it ——, Babe? Mother Mary'd mos' die if Charlie didn't come home tomorrow."

XI

MARY SANDERS, up late the night before in seeing that her guests were made comfortable, in doing what ranch skill and a woman's instinct told her how to do for Babe Deveril's wound, in taking time for a last cheery word and a good night kiss for Marian, was up and about early this morning. She had dressed and slipped quietly out to the wide porch of the range-house before the misty darkness of the dawn had thinned in the east. She had stood there long alone, looking with an eagerness that was wistful and tender and anxious toward the road which skirted the Frying Pan and turned in at the lower gate.

"He'll come," she had whispered, her eyes suddenly as misty as the coming dawn. "Oh, I know he'll come! God *is* good after all."

And then she hurried to the kitchen, that everything might be ready when he did come. It seemed that there was a particular way in which everything should be done this morning; the coffee must be made just so, the bacon cut into short rectangles, whereas it was usually fried in long strips, the biscuits to be Mother Mary's best.

She skimmed a big pan of milk and set away in a secret corner of the cupboard a little pitcher that held the cream of the cream. She had gone into the yard to collect eggs and had hidden the two biggest, freshest looking—they were all laid the previous day—at the side of the little cream-pitcher when her husband came into the kitchen.

"Good mornin', Mary Girl," Johnny Sanders said rather softly for him. He came to her and put his two arms around her and kissed her. "You're jus' the fines' little woman this side Heaven, an' here's hopin' you have a hundred more birthdays, all better'n this!"

Whereupon having made his annual oration, Johnny Sanders reddened with his annual embarrassment, Mary with her annual pleasure, and they drew apart like two guilty children as Babe and Stet came into the room.

"Mother Mary!" chided Stet. "Here you are with another birthday an' a-flirtin' with ol' Johnny before breakfas', like you was jus' come sixteen! Johnny, quit bein' a hog an' takin' all Mother Mary's blushin' kisses."

And he in turn gathered her into his arms, picked her up, her feet clean off the floor, kissed her resoundingly and set her down at the other side of the room where he had carried her bodily.

"You scamp!" she cried, laughing at him and slapping his face with her open palm, so that both Stet's face and her hand reddened. "Don't you know no better'n to treat your Mother Mary like that?"

Babe too came forward; Babe too kissed her and wished her all the good, God-filled years to come that she so rightly deserved, which was a long eternity of them. And then she chased them all out of the kitchen, slamming the door at their backs, scolding and laughing, and when they were gone she went back behind her closet-door again.

"He'll come today," she whispered. "I know he'll come."

And when a moment later Marian came into the kitchen to bring the fourth kiss of the morning and the fourth hearty well-wishings, Mother Mary was as gay and talkative as it was her custom to be.

At the breakfast table her cheeks were a little flushed, her eyes brighter than usual with the eagerness and anxiety still looking out of them, and at every little sound from

Digitized by Google

the yard she started and looked out. And yet the breakfast was eaten, the dishes washed, the morning coffee cold—and Charlie Sanders did not come.

Some of the boys came up from the bunkhouse before beginning their day's work to speak their blunt, short-worded greetings, having remembered the day this way for many years. They brought many little, useless things, which they had bought for her upon the last trip to town, bestowed them awkwardly and good-humoredly, and after a brief chat with Stet and Babe Deveril, and many swift and often lingering looks at Marian Lee, went back to the corrals. And Mother Mary thanked them all and blessed them all and scolded them all, and they went away laughing. But in the corrals their faces were grave.

"Somebody jus' nacherally oughta kill Charlie," one of them growled with much emphasis and accompanying profanity, "before he kills her."

THAT day Marian found her quick opportunity to repay this little woman for much of her kindness of yesterday. For, while Babe and Stet could only pretend not to see the trouble which grew in the misty eyes with each passing, empty hour, Marian had the woman's way of mutely acknowledging that she understood, of giving out her sympathy wordlessly, of bringing a certain slight comfort into a weary day.

"But he'll come, Miss Marian!" Mother Mary cried more than once. "Oh, I *know* he'll come!"

Johnny Sanders, a man who did not know the meaning of an idle day, was not to be seen about the place an hour after sunup. Babe Deveril and Stet Davis withdrew from the house and went down to the corrals, where they sat hour after hour, smoking, talking, planning.

Babe's one chief business in life just now must be to get well; his wound had not had a chance to heal, and he must give it that chance. He was optimistic about it, as it was his nature to be concerning all things, and believed that a few days of rest here would put him in such shape that he could do his day's riding and could count on a steady hand when the need came.

And the need would surely come and come soon now. For he thought that he could put his hand on Crag Verilees with little trouble, having stumbled into the watered valley in the Bad Country. And then, too, the men of the Roman IV were ready to lend a hand; Ches Mann was doing something beyond swear at crazy Bill Hancock, and was looking for his lost cattle.

"We can find them, every hoof and tail of them," Babe said positively, "right in that valley in the Bad Country! I've had time to figure it all out, Stet. Remember how the country stretches, rocky and dry, and too hard to dent to an elephant's track pretty near all the way into Larkspur? They get the stock into the Bad Country and they hide signs, and it's a job, but not such a powerful bad job either, not for the gang of twenty or thirty men Temlock and Verilees can get into line in two day's time.

"They herd 'em close in the valley long enough for the first excitement to flare up and burn down like a fire sinkin' for want of fresh fuel, and then they drive at night along the gullies leadin' down into the yards below Larkspur."

"Looks simple," grunted Stet. "A couple of crooks in Temlock's pay at the railroad, a sweaty night's work, an' the whole string slippin' along the rails, headed East an' to Chicago. An' they get time in the valley to blot the brands, too. It looks simple. Only we oughta stop their little play this trip. Huh?"

"Yes. How long a vacation are you takin' from the Wagon Wheel, Stet?"

Stet colored a little and his eyes dropped to his cigarette.

"Long's I want," he returned quietly. "I thought maybe I was ridin' a long trail when I set out, an' I sent word to the ol' man he better not look for me real soon."

"Then you're the man to do the work now. If you'll strike out for the Two Bar-O and carry the word, you can pick up a dozen punchers there who will be glad to get into the game. Ride from there to the Roman IV and you'll scare up some more; Ches Mann'll bring along every hand he's got."

"There's a half dozen boys from the Wagon Wheel who'll be sore on me the res' of their lives if we don't let them in on the play," Stet added.

"We'll need all we can get," Deveril assured him. "I don't know how many men are in on the steal, but you can gamble that they are not doing this sort of work with less than a couple of dozen. Men in their

Digitized by Google

line of business are always expectin' something to break, and they'll be on the lookout for trouble. It's not goin' to be an easy matter, Stet, to wipe that gang out."

Stet got to his feet and making no answer stared out across the low-lying hills toward the Bad Country. And then his head turned a little and his eyes went to the house. As he turned, Marian came out on the porch.

"You'll jus' stay here until we get back?" he asked colorlessly.

Babe Deveril's eyes, too, had gone to the house. For a moment then the two men looked into each other's faces as they had looked the night before. Only this time they did not turn away.

"It's my only play, Stet," Babe said slowly. "I've got to be in at the showdown —you know that. Somebody's goin' to get Crag Verilees this time, an it's got to be me! I—I don't like the job, Stet, of waitin' here, doin' nothin'——"

Stet Davis cut him short with an unpleasant laugh.

"Oh, you'll find plenty to do," he said bitterly. "While I go chasin' off acrost the country doin' the dirty work, you'll——"

He broke off suddenly, his eyes darkening. Babe got slowly to his feet, his own eyes frowning.

"Look here, Stet," he said, his tone low and measured. "There's no sense in a man goin' and makin' a mistake just because——"

"Mistake?" Again Stet laughed shortly. "I guess I ain't makin' no mistake this time. There's times when a man'll play fair an' square; there's times when the game is too big for him to play square with a frien' an' he forgets——"

"Stet!" There was a quick note of anger in Deveril's voice now, a note of warning. "Are you crazy, man?"

"Crazy?" Stet eyed him cooly. "Maybe I am. I don't know whose business it is anyhow. I do purty much as I —— please an' I say purty much what I mean. Maybe you've noticed that? Anyway, if I am crazy, I ain't a fool, an' don't you go thinkin' I am. Now there's work to be did an' I'm goin' to do it. I'll carry the word an' I'll get back here inside twenty-four hours. 'Cause I'll sen' another man on the jump with the word from the firs' place I hit an' I'll make it my business to ride back this way."

There the matter ended. Stet turned abruptly and went into the barn for his horse. He saddled quickly, swung up into the saddle and with no word, no single look toward the man he had left in the corral, rode up to the house. Babe saw him rein in there, call a short good-by to Mary Sanders and the gray-eyed girl at her side. The frown in Deveril's eyes darkened when he heard Stet's voice, lifted and meant to carry to the corrals, saying:

"I'm comin' back real soon, Mother Mary. I got business up this way."

And he was gone, racing into the south and with no backward look at the man in the corral.

BABE went back to his soap-box and his smoking, a little of Stet's bitterness rankling in his heart. He wasn't shirking and he knew it, and Stet ought to know it. He was a wounded man, badly hurt, and Stet was the one to do this work.

He was glad that Marian Lee was on the ranch, but he told himself savagely that that fact had nothing to do with his staying here while his old friend did the work to be done. And in a sudden flash of anger he swore to himself that he would keep away from the house, that he would see very little of Marian, and that Stet when he came back would apologize or prove himself very little of a man. And then a shadow fell across him and he looked up quickly and found the girl at his side.

For a moment she looked at him wonderingly, her face flushing. For she had seen the anger in his eyes, and had seen in them no welcome.

"You don't seem the least little bit glad that I've come out to talk with you, Mr. Deveril," she said a trifle stiffly. "I didn't intend to intrude upon your solitude."

"I'm always glad to see you," he answered her quietly.

She lifted her shoulders.

"If the eyes are the windows of the soul," she retorted, "your soul must look like a stove-pipe inside. What's the matter?"

He flushed now, too.

"I've just been on the verge of quarrelin' with an old friend," he told her. "That makes a man's mouth taste bitter, you know."

"Quarreling with Stet!" in quick surprise. "Why what on earth do you want to quarrel

Digitized by Google

with him for? He's just about the best, fairest, squarest fellow in the world!"

Deveril's eyes, beginning to soften now that she was with him, hardened at her words—almost Stet's own words in her mouth.

"I'm glad that you think so," was all that he answered.

She looked at him curiously.

"What's happened?" she asked gently. "I never saw you like this before. Why, I actually believe that you want to quarrel with me, too!"

"As a matter of fact I don't want to quarrel with anybody," he returned a bit stubbornly.

Womankind is, theoretically, very blind in seeing a certain thing which every one else sees from the start. Perhaps Marian Lee was an exception to the rule, or perhaps something is the matter with the theory. At any rate a quick light came into her eyes, a light which, had Deveril seen it, might have hinted that she had her own guess at the cause of his bitterness toward Stet, and that she drew from it something of satisfaction, something of mischievous amusement, and that she did not treat it very seriously.

"You two remind me very much of two bad little boys," she told him, her tone seeking to be properly serious for scolding purposes and yet hinting at soft laughter. "Now, although you haven't been very nice to me, I am going to talk with you a while. For two very good reasons, Mr. Deveril, sir! First, because I know Mrs. Sanders wants to be alone, and second—" now her voice was serious enough—"because I have something to say to you—something to ask of you."

He looked at her curiously. He even began to feel ashamed of himself, and pushed his box toward her and made her sit down.

"What is it?" he asked quickly. "Is it something I can do for you?"

"Yes." She sat down, made herself comfortable with her back to the corral and looked up into his face, smiling a little. "You can if you will."

"And I will if I can," he told her earnestly.

"Are you sure? Oh, if you would only—but, listen: I know why Stet has hurried away and where he has gone. You are planning on getting a lot of cowboys together and on making war on the Temlock gang, aren't you?"

"How'd you know?" in surprise.

"Then I am right? I knew that Stet had brought word that the Roman IV had lost a lot of cattle, that a man had been badly hurt and that it was thought that this was the work of Temlock and Verilees and their crowd. I knew you, I knew Stet Davis, and I guessed the rest."

"Well, you guessed right," he admitted. "And what——"

"Listen a minute: Those men are bad men, they are law-breakers and it is right that they should be punished. But are you thinking more of the theft of the cattle or—or just of Crag Verilees?"

"Well?" he asked quietly.

"This is what you can do for me—if you will! You can see that those men are stopped in their lawlessness, you can have them handed over to the law! Let them be brought to trial, let them serve what terms the law imposes on them."

"Do you think," he asked her in surprise, "that they are going to give up when we call on them to? Do you think that Temlock is that kind? Or Crag Verilees?"

"You can make them do it!" she cried impetuously. "You can get so many men with you that you can surround them, and they'll see that it would be madness to fight their way out! You can promise me that if you should see Crag Verilees——"

"What?" sternly.

"That you will not kill him! That you will give him a chance—one more chance! He is a bad man, oh, I know that. I don't know what he has done to you, but I do know that it is an unspeakably horrible thing to kill a man! You think only of that thing you call the red law—that horrible, horrible thing. There *is* another law; you can have justice there, in the courts, and not have your hands all red with blood. I have done something for you, haven't I, Babe Deveril? Won't you do this thing for me—this one thing?"

"Marian," he said, his low voice very hard, "I would do anything in the world for you that I could do. You say you don't know what Crag Verilees has done. Go ask Mother Mary. She knows. And you are wrong about that other law—the law of the courts. There is only one law anywhere from one corner of the world to another to deal with a man like him, who has done the

Digitized by Google

thing he has done. I am sorry, Marian, but——"

"But," she said coldly, "you are not sorry enough. You would kill him if you had the chance."

"Yes," he said sternly. "And I pray God I'll get the chance—soon!"

She had turned from him and was looking off toward the Bad Country. And then, before either spoke again, they heard a low cry from the house, a cry that came from a mother's heart and that choked in a mother's throat.

It was Charlie, Charlie come home for his mother's birthday. Just a boy, not twenty yet, a blue-eyed, brown-haired, slim, awkward boy. He had slipped from his saddle and had called a "Happy birthday, mama." He had gone with swift strides to meet the little woman who sped down the steps and threw her arms about his neck. And he had one arm, his right arm, about her and his cheek close to hers. The left arm hung useless in its sling.

"He, too, is shot!" cried Marian Lee hotly. "Here is some more work of your red law!"

"Here," he returned bluntly, "is some more work of men like Temlock and Crag Verilees! Two years ago Charlie was a decent boy. And now——"

She looked at him swiftly, her eyes commanding him to go on. But he stared back at her moodily and remained silent.

XII

IT WAS night, moonless, starless, pitch black in the Bad Country. Babe Deveril, his horse waiting for him in a hollow upon the south side of the ridge, was making his stealthy way forward on foot, drawing closer at every silent step to the light he saw burning down there in the little hidden valley.

When he left the Frying Pan, Stet Davis had not come back; evidently as he rode his wrath had cooled, his vision had cleared and he himself had ridden upon the business of carrying word and gathering men. And while Deveril grew restless in the enforced idleness of waiting for his wound to heal, the punchers had not come.

Only later was he to learn that Ches Mann of the Roman IV had been drawn away upon a false scent, cleverly placed for him; had followed a fruitless trail and had sent every man he could get his hands on toward the south plains.

So at last, fearful that the herds which he was so certain had been driven into the hidden valley would be driven on and out before he could come to them, Babe Deveril rode back into the Bad Country as he had ridden before, alone. He was not well, would not be well for many a long day. But a little of his strength had come back to him, his hand was steady again, and there was urgent work to be done.

"You are going after Crag Verilees?" Marian had said to him quietly.

"I am goin' to see if I am right and if Temlock and Verilees have hidden the cattle in the Bad Country," he evaded.

"And if you should find Verilees?"

He had had nothing to say. She had turned from him and he had gone without saying good-by. And then Marian Lee had gone quickly to Mary Sanders and had asked her what the thing was which Crag Verilees had done. Mother Mary, her face suddenly as hard as her husband's, told the story, a wretched story of wrong done a woman by a man who was merciless, and the girl who heard shuddered less at the account of the double murder which followed than at what went before.

The woman had been the young wife of a friend of Babe Deveril's; wife and husband had been coolly shot down by Crag Verilees. Oh, yes, he had been accused and arrested and tried. That was last year. And in the courts of law a lawyer—Marian was spared the knowledge of who that lawyer was—had connived with a crooked judge, and Crag Verilees had gone free. But now the evidence was in the hands of Babe Deveril and there would be no bribing this time.

Then Marian Lee had run out on the porch again, hoping that Deveril would turn, that she might wave her handkerchief to him. But he had not turned.

And now, in the thick darkness which lay over the Bad Country, he was making his slow, guarded way toward the light that burned in the dugout. He knew already that he had come on time. Borne upon the faint breeze, there came to him from the north end of the valley the lowing now and then of a restless cow.

"There's a chance," he told himself, "that these fellows have worked this game so many times they're gettin' a bit careless.

Digitized by Google

They'll have night-herders on the cattle but they're apt to leave this end open. And there's the chance that Temlock and Crag Verilees are both still here."

He made his way closer to the dugout, so close to the cliffs at the back that his right hand, feeling the way, never lost the touch of them. Already he heard voices, a low, droning, indistinct monotone from the dugout.

The door and the little square window were both open; there was plenty of light from the three candles stuck on boxes or bracketed rudely to the walls. Stopping now, not twenty steps from the rough building, moving out a couple of paces from the wall of cliffs, he could look into the room.

AND there were the two men whom most of all men he wanted to find. Temlock sat, his heavy shoulders stooping, upon a rude camp-stool, his elbow touching the box upon which a candle burned and a bottle stood. Crag Verilees lay upon his back on the little bunk, his hands clasped behind his head, his lean, wolfish face lifted into the light, the sneering silent laugh characteristic of the man, showing the cruel mouth twisted, the lips drawn back from the sharp teeth.

They were in the light, Babe in the dark. He could, in a flash of time cover them both with his two guns, calling on them to throw up their hands. He cursed himself for a fool; the one thing to do was to shoot without warning, to kill Verilees as he lay there unsuspecting. That would have been Crag Verilees' way; that was the end which Crag Verilees deserved. And yet he could not do the thing that way; he could give Verilees an even break—and then kill him.

But first he must move a little to the side so that he came on them from the door; the window was not large enough. A little movement on the part of the men within and they would drop out of sight. Then, the candles out, they would have slipped again from his grasp.

He had both revolvers in his hands now. He began to move to the side, toward the door, when the thing that Verilees was saying stopped him.

"You got the savvy all right when it comes to a cattle deal," he laughed. "But when it comes to a female you ain't got no sense, Temlock."

Temlock glared angrily at him.

"That's my game an' I'm playin' it my way, Verilees," he said shortly.

"An' ain't playin' it to win very fas'," laughed Verilees, undisturbed by the other's tone. "You ain't got your dame, an' you don't know where she is, an' you're jus' takin' —— fool chances of gettin' us all in a tight hole where we'll have to shoot our way out an' run for it."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Temlock sharply.

"Jus' what I say," coolly. "You're gettin' that little shrimp of a law crook mixed up in our play jus' so you can put the screws on him an' get his girl. Hmf! Shows what you know about females, anyway. He could talk an' threaten all year an' she wouldn't pay no more attention to him than she did in Hang Town after the dance."

"I ain't askin' for none of your wisdom on that deal," growled Temlock. "I usually know what I'm doin', an' I do it my way."

"Oh, all right," lightly. Verilees sat up and reached out for the bottle. "Don't get touchy. I was sayin'——"

"You was sayin' that I'm takin' chances by lettin' Ellston in. How's that come in, huh?"

Crag Verilees drank and put the bottle back before answering.

"There's diff'rent kinds of crooks, Temlock. There's crooks that has got sand an'll stick by a pal, an' there's crooks as is cowards an' would squeal in a minute to save from gettin' a little finger hurt. That's Ellston's kind."

Now Temlock laughed.

"Look at that, Crag," he said with a trifle more of good humor in his heavy voice. He jerked a little, fat pocket-book from his hip and tossed it to the couch. "Guess you didn't know my system, huh?"

Verilees looked a moment at the book, glanced over its entries, unfolded a couple of papers and tossed it back.

"That's nothin' " he said contemptuously. "I know what you got. You made him sign for some of the money, an' made him say how it come from sale of cattle we rustled. An' you think you can keep his lyin' mouth shet with a little piece of paper? That's the way you try to make sure of all the men, an' with the others maybe it's all right. They're square anyhow an' you don't need it. But Ellston?" he jeered.

Digitized by Google

"Suppose he was took sick an' was goin' to die, suppose he got hurt some way an' was goin' to die—don't you suppose he'd squeal his little head off?"

"If he gets hurt," snapped Temlock, shoving the book back into his pocket and stuffing a big handkerchief down over it, "he'll die —— quick an' won't have time to squeal. I'm watchin' him, Verilees."

As the men grew silent again, Babe Deveril moved a little further toward the front of the dugout. Step by step he made his slow way, reckless of the chances he was taking if perhaps a third or fourth man of the gang might be sleeping in his blankets within hearing distance.

And then, just as he came where he could look in at the open door, just as he was ready to call softly, "Up with your hands!" he stopped again, drew back again, swiftly, into the deeper darkness from which he had stepped. For he had heard the noisy clatter of hoofs, hoofs from the south, and frowning into the blackness he made out the running blurred forms of two horses.

"Stet Davis and Ches Mann!" was his first quick thought. And then he knew that Stet and Ches, had they been alone, would not have ridden this way into the valley, the noisy approach warning any one who might hear. It would be two of the Temlock crowd.

And then, in another moment, he knew that there were not two men but just one and that he was leading the second horse. He drew a little further back under the cliffs, again commanding a view of the window. He saw that Temlock and Verilees were on their feet, their hands at their hips. He saw the racing horses come on, saw them stop at the dugout door, saw a man throw himself from the saddle and hurry forward. And, his curiosity keen, his anger high at the interruption, he waited and watched.

The man quickly came into the dugout. He was a lean, hard-faced fellow, quick-eyed and nervous in his manner, and had about him the evidences of a hard ride.

"Hello, Jim!" It was Temlock who spoke as he and Verilees went back to their seats. "You make enough racket for a dozen men. What luck?"

"Good," grunted Jim. "Gimme a drink." He took up the bottle himself, drank deeply, set it down, wiped his mouth on the back of his hand and ended. "I found her!"

"Where?" demanded Temlock eagerly.

"At Johnny Sanders' place. An' I foun' something else! Come here."

HE TURNED abruptly and led the way back to the door, carrying a candle in his hand. Temlock and Verilees, evidently wondering, went with him.

He came to the two horses and held the light close to the side on one, the one he had led. It was saddled and bridled, a rifle was in its holster, and Babe Deveril knew the horse. It was the one he had ridden here tonight and left in the hollow upon the far side of the ridge.

"Well?" snapped Temlock. "What about it?"

"I picked it up on my way in," said the man swiftly. "Foun' it hid less'n a mile from here. What's it doin' here, huh? Where's the man as rode it, huh?"

Temlock and Crag Verilees exchanged quick, startled glances.

"Look at the brand," went on Jim hastily. He held the candle closer. "It's a Fryin' Pan horse! An' Babe Deveril an' Stet Davis was both at the Fryin' Pan less'n a week ago!"

Temlock's low, muttered curse was drowned by Verilees saying sharply—

"Maybe it's Charlie Sanders ——"

"But it ain't," cut in Jim positively. "Charlie is still at the range lettin' his mother an' Temlock's girl nurse his sick arm. From all signs he ain't in no hurry to get well, neither," he ended with a short laugh.

In one flash of a second Babe Deveril saw and understood the hand Fate had dealt him, the hand he must play out against odds. So far he had played the losing game; he had lost a great deal when in a solitary land his horse hidden in a dark hollow had neighed at another horse and had been found by a Temlock man.

It would have been bad enough had he not had that wound, not yet healed. Now, thinking clearly, coolly and swiftly he saw that his chance of escape, should he seek it, had dwindled almost to impossibility. Temlock and Verilees knew that some one had ridden here from the Frying Pan and they would be quick to look for Babe Deveril or Stet Davis; they would be on the lookout now. If they did not find him before morning, what chance would he have

Digitized by Google

tomorrow on foot in a country like this?

"They're only three—they're in the light and I'm in the dark—I've got to fight it out," he told himself grimly.

"If there's jus' one man—" Temlock was speaking, his voice lowered—"we'll get him before he can clean out. If there's more'n one, if they've tracked us after all, why—we'll clean the bunch out! Ride to the upper en', Jim, an' ride like ——! Tell the boys an' tell Dick to get every man in the saddle an' down here on the run. The cattle'll look out for themselves tonight. Tell him—" Jim swung up into the saddle still warm from his riding—"that I'm payin' any man of the crowd an extra hundred if he nails the man this horse belongs to!"

Jim was already racing away toward the north end of the valley. The other horse was still in front of the dugout, Verilees siezing the dragging reins and jerking the animal toward him viciously.

"And now," came Deveril's quick thought, "it's only two to one!"

He had his chance with Temlock and Verilees, the chance to square an old score and to get his horse and ride, ride hard before Jim came back with Dick and the rest. And again the words of the two men held him waiting.

"Anyway," cried Temlock harshly, "I've found her! She's at Johnny Sanders' place!"

"Are you crazy?" snarled Crag Verilees. "Haven't you got enough to think about without——"

"Shut up!" Temlock swung about upon him angrily, threateningly. "I'm sick of your croakin', Verilees. When I want a thing like I want that girl I get it. And I'm goin' to get her!"

"Yes?" sneered Verilees. "An' then goin' to be fool enough to marry her, huh? Oh, of course it'll be easy——"

"I'll make it easy! How? —— you, Verilees, I'll tell you how! An' I'll give what orders I like, an' you'll obey 'em like the res' of the boys! Oh, I've had plenty of your back-talk, more'n plenty! An' what are you that I got to listen if I don't feel like it?"

"I'm the bes' man you got doin' your dirty work, an' you know it," returned Crag Verilees coolly. "I'm worth any six of your crowd, an' you know that, too. An' what's more I'm the only man in the whole —— outfit that ain't afraid of you! That's something. An' if you want to know it, Temlock, I'm gettin' jus' a little bit sick of my job!"

"Spit it out, —— you!" cried Temlock angrily. "If you got anything to say, say it!"

"Which I'm doin'," went on Crag Verilees in the same cool, insolent tone. "Here you hold a couple of dozen men in your hand, seein' you got more brains than they have, an' you get 'em signed up on a piece of dirty paper, sayin' they've took shares out'n a cattle stealin' or a hold-up.

"You go an' put over a stunt like this las' of rustlin' a hundred head off'n the Roman IV. You slam them cows down in the yards in Larkspur an' you get five thousan' in gold for the deal. You shove half in your pockets an' let the res' scrap over the other measly twenty-five hundred. A dozen men in on this job an' they get about two hundred apiece while you get two thousan' five hundred. An' me——"

"Yes, you!" snarled Temlock. "Ain't you satisfied?"

"No, I ain't! Who put this whole deal acrost? Who engineered it from soup to nuts, huh? An' what do I get? I get five hundred for riskin' my hide firs' and my neck nex'."

"You're drawin' good wages," retorted Temlock. "You never made five hundred that quick before I took you on."

"That's all right if I didn't. I can now. An' now, when it comes to a tight pinch, an' we're all in a mighty good way to swing to the firs' tree big enough for the job, you set up like a little tin god an' get the crazy hunch I'm goin to let you send us all down the slide because you've got a hankerin' after a girl! I've tol' you already you was riskin' too much lettin' Ellston in. Now if you go chasin' after the girl——"

"You hit it right once," cut in Temlock, his voice sweeping arrogantly across Verilees's words, "when you said I got these boys where I want 'em because I got the brains. An' if you had the brains, Crag Verilees, you might go after my job an' get it. But you ain't. You watch my play a few more years an' maybe you'll grow up!

"Now, listen to me, an' if you get tired listenin' say so an' I'll give you the chance you're aching for, to see if you're quicker'n me on the draw! I say I'm goin' after that girl an' I'm goin' to have her. Now, when

Digitized by Google

I do anything, maybe it's part hunch, but you can gamble it's mos' brains."

"I'm listenin'," sneered Verilees.

And Babe Deveril, waiting and watching, could see that these two men watched each other as closely as he watched them both.

"Which you generally do when I mean business," muttered Temlock. "Jim here says she's at the Fryin' Pan. Jim says, Deveril an' Davis both was at the Fryin' Pan an' is gone now. One's hereabouts—we got his horse. Where's the other?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Verilees quickly.

"I mean that I've thought that out already before you noticed it! How'd one of 'em happen to come here? It's because he's on to our game! The game you engineered from soup to nuts! Why ain't the other with him? It's plain open an' shut. It's because he's rode down to some of the other ranges to get a crowd together!

"An' now what do we do? Ship our stock on to Chicago? Rush 'em down to Larkspur on the dead run an' get 'em on the cars? Then these guys get the wires hot an' somewhere between here an' Chicago the shipment is stopped an' we get —— on both ends! That's what would happen if you had my job. You jus' wait till you grow to fit your breeches, Verilees."

"Chasin' after the girl will help, I reckon," muttered Verilees.

"Who said it would? I said I'd get her, that's all. We can set tight here an' let 'em close in on us, about a hundred strong an' with rifles. Or we can make a play that'll fool 'em. We can leave the cows here an' hit the trail down to the Fryin' Pan. Deveril an' Davis' crowd'll meet there, it's fair bettin'.

"We can take our chance on gettin' to the place firs' an bein' ready to hand 'em a surprise out'n the doors an' windows when they ride up, or if they get there firs' we can play Injun with 'em on the trail this side, when they ain't lookin' for it. Then I'm ready to clean out and take a trip across the border. Anyway, we can wipe 'em out. An' if we set here or if we drive on to Larkspur they'll get the drop on us. Now, what you got to say?"

"I say you got sand in your eyes," as coolly, as insolently as before. "If we get the cattle on the run now who's to know we shipped at Larkspur?"

Temlock stared at him curiously a moment.

"Can't you see through window glass, Verilees?" he asked snappily. "Who's to know? Why, the man who put 'em wise to the whole play! The man you drawed in, thinkin' you'd have some sport makin' a kid go crooked. Charlie Sanders, that's who!

Verilees jerked his head up quickly, the blood running for the first time into his cool cheeks.

"The dirty little snake!" he cried sharply. "If I don't twis' his little neck! I'm with you, Temlock, for this time. An' while you take half your gang an' look for the jasper who's spyin' on us, let me take the other half an' ride to the Fryin' Pan. Don't worry, I'll take good care of your girl for you."

XIII

BABE DEVERIL knew that the time had come to act, to act swiftly. It was no longer just the matter of his own safety. Never had danger threatened Marian Lee as it threatened now. He must think of that.

He must remember that these men were warned now, that it was not their way to wait here for the cowboys for whom Stet Davis had ridden south. They would ride out to meet them. They would come upon them unexpectedly at the Frying Pan or they would ambush them on the dark trail.

It was too dark where Temlock and Verilees stood for accurate shooting. Jim had dropped the candle as he had obeyed Temlock's order to ride to the north end with the word. There was just one thing to do: to wait a brief moment until the two men went back into the light of the dugout, or toward it, and then to call to them to throw up their hands.

They wouldn't do that, and he knew it. They would answer his voice with the guns ready at their hips. But he would be ready, too. And, because everything hung now on the pull of a trigger, he must make his first two shots do their business. Then he could swing up to his horse's back and run for it. It was the only chance for Babe Deveril, the only chance for the men who were his friends and for a girl who was more than a friend to him already.

And then came Verilees' snarling voice

Digitized by Google

and he knew that he must not wait for better light, that he must take the chance Fate had given him and trust to that chance.

"I'll hit the trail for the north an' after Jim," Verilees was saying. "If we got some ridin' to do, I'm goin' to change horses. I'll ride this here Fryin' Pan brute——"

"Up with your hands!" cried Babe Deveril sharply.

He had both guns up. They were covering Temlock and Verilees as well as he could cover them in the uncertain light. As he spoke he leaped nearer and fired. For both Temlock and Crag Verilees, at the curt command, had plunged sideways into the deeper darkness, answering his words with the bark of a revolver.

Deveril heard a grunt of pain at his first shot and knew that he had not missed Temlock. But Temlock's gun was spitting fire at him and he knew too that he had not badly hurt his man. For a moment he thought that he had killed Verilees; there came no second shot from him for several seconds.

Deveril fired again at Temlock, or at the blot in the blackness which he took to be Temlock. And then there came from the darkness into which Crag Verilees had disappeared a stream of bullets, five shots as fast as he could pull the trigger—and Babe Deveril cursed under his breath as he fired back.

For Verilees had not shot at him, had not sought the small indistinct target when there was one he could not miss. He had fired at the big bulk of the frightened Frying Pan horse and the animal had fallen.

"Take it slow, Temlock," came Crag Verilees's cool, laughing voice. "He's on foot now, an' we can pick him off mos' any time. The boys'll be here in two shakes."

For a moment it looked so utterly hopeless to Babe Deveril that his arm fell inert at his side. And then anger, hatred and the thought of Marian Lee steeled the lax muscles, and he ran closer, firing as he came. And he heard Temlock and Verilees moving back before him while their bullets hissed about him and ploughed in the dirt at his feet.

He sped toward their answering fire recklessly. It mattered little now if they got him, provided he could get them, too! For Verilees had said that the boys would come in a minute, and then what chance for Babe Deveril? The one thing, even if he were killed in the doing of it, was to drop Temlock and Verilees. With these men gone all danger of attack on the Frying Pan would be minimized, might be averted entirely.

But in that darkness it was impossible for him to be sure of hitting a man ten steps away. And Temlock and Verilees kept a safer distance than that. They were drawing back as he came forward and, they were separating so that in a moment he would be between them.

Then he heard the thud of hoofs from the north and knew that Jim had heard the firing or that some of the night-herders, already mounted, had heard it and were racing to the dugout. In a moment there would be a dozen men against him and he would go down, riddled by bullets and his work all undone.

He had counted his shots; he had fired ten times; he had one shot left in each revolver. And they would give him little time for reloading. He glanced quickly to the side and saw the candles burning in the dugout; almost at his side lay his horse, dead.

And then a quick thought that brought a gleam of hope with it came to him. Moving swiftly but silently now, suddenly ceasing his fire, he stooped over the Frying Pan animal, found his rifle still in its holster, found that he could draw it out, and then as the rifle came to his shoulder he fired twice.

At the first shot the nearest candle in the dugout was broken to bits; the second shot toppled over the box upon which the other stood by the whisky bottle and extinguished it. And then a quick dash brought him into the dugout as the pounding hoof-beats stopped not fifty yards away.

"I CAN hold 'em a while here," he muttered with grim satisfaction, as he moved to the side of the door, hearing the rattle of bullets against the wall. "And every little hour I keep 'em pluggin' away at me means Ches and Stet and the bunch will be an hour nearer the Fryin' Pan."

His knowledge of the interior of the little cabin stood him in good stead now. He could find the bunk easily in the darkness. He sat down, his rifle at his side, and hastily reloaded his revolvers. Now they were good for a dozen shots and he would make the dozen shots count. His rifle cartridge-belt was full, the magazine was full and he

Digitized by Google

would spend lead carefully. For suddenly the basest of metals had become more precious than gold.

"He's in the dugout!" It was Crag Verilees' shout, and it rang through the night exultingly. "Who's that? You, Jim?"

"No," came a quick answer. "It's me an' Lefty. What's up? Who is it?"

"We'll know —— quick," came Temlock's heavy voice. "It's Stet Davis or Babe Deveril, I think. Move aroun' to the other side, Lefty, so's he can't climb out'n the window if he gets the notion. Andy, you an' Verilees watch the door. I'm goin' to keep this side. Where's Jim?"

"He's rode on with the word. The boys'll be down in a minute."

Now Babe was ready for them. If only he could pick off Temlock and Verilees in that utter blackness!

"Come on, Verilees!" he shouted. "I've left the door open for you. It's Deveril, and I'm home to callers! Come on!"

"I'll come quick enough," answered Verilees coolly. "An' when I come in I'll scratch a match an' look down in your face—an' you won't see me!"

Deveril shot at the voice and heard Verilees laugh. And he heard the pounding of other hoofs from the north.

"If I could only keep 'em all night!" he muttered. "I don't care what happens in the mornin'!"

How long could he keep them? That was the only question now. He thought of that while he ejected the empty cartridge from his rifle and threw a fresh one into the barrel. He was preparing his defense; he was trying to see exactly what form their attack must take. They would not rush on him through the narrow doorway, for that would give him the one advantage and he could drop many a man of them before one of their chance bullets could find him in the darkness of the rear of the dugout.

They might try to burn him out? He had thought of that even as he rushed here into the cabin. But he had thought, too, of the walls, part stone, and of the roof made of thick slabs, dirt-covered. They would have their work cut out for them if they tried that, and he would give account of himself through the holes in the wall and through the window.

The door! He stepped to it softly, drew it shut and dropped into place the heavy wooden bar which secured it.

It was very quiet without. He knew that Temlock was placing his men; he felt sure that their attack would begin in earnest in a moment. They knew that Stet Davis had ridden for men; they would be in a hurry to get this thing over with and to be in their saddles.

He broke down the bunk and dragged it to a far corner of the room, making a barricade of it. He made himself comfortable on the floor behind it, his rifle in his hands, his revolvers laid where he could find them quickly just beside him on the floor.

Now there was nothing to do but wait. He saw no chance of coming out of this thing alive but none the less he must wait, must drag out the fight as long as he could, must make his lead and powder tell. He knew that there was a possibility of Stet Davis and Ches Mann coming before many hours; he knew on the other hand that he must not think of that, that they might not come for days.

He told himself that had only his own fate depended upon what he did he would not stay here like a rat in his hole; he would step outside and die in the open, die fighting, and that he would get Crag Verilees first. But now he must prolong the thing, he must stay here until they burned him out or until a chance bullet found him.

He was young, was Babe Deveril, and had little wish to die. But, now with the fighting spirit high within him, he had less wish to be thought afraid. They had him trapped, they knew that they were going to kill him, they knew that he knew this. And Crag Verilees might even now be laughing that evil, wolfish, silent laugh of his, picturing the trapped man going white and trembling.

And so Babe Deveril, reckless now as he had ever been, defiant and fearless, sent them his message to tell Crag Verilees and the rest that he was unafraid. There in the darkness, all alone, with death threatening him on every side, he put back his head, and keeping time with a thumb beating against the stock of his rifle, lifted his clear young voice in lusty, untroubled song.

He sang a song of the range, a song that was known from one end of the cattle country to the other, and his voice reached the high notes, sank to the low, soared upward again serene, steady, clear and richly musical. It was the song known east, west,

Digitized by Google

north and south of the Bad Country, "The Cowboy's Finish":

OH!—I carve my meat with a bow-ie knife,
An' I pick my teeth with the same;
An' I sleep with a rattlesnake wrapped 'roun' my neck,
An' I set in mos' any ol' game.

OH!—I'm bad as they make 'em, I'm tough as they come!
I'm a ramblin' ol' puncher who's done his las' spree.
I've rode my las' trail like a son-of-a-gun,
An' now I'll ride hard an' ride far an' ride free!

He stopped, drawing his lungs full of the sweet air. It was a wonderful thing just to be alive, how wonderful he had never noticed before. Well, he would make the most of what was left to him of life. He would live it out merrily; he would ride his last trail as a man should.

Outside it was very silent. Then, as his song hushed, he heard a man laugh; he heard a heavy voice calling something, he could not catch the words, and he struck into the chorus. And at the first word of the refrain he heard other voices, voices outside, lifted in unison with his, and as he sang his blood tingled to hear those other men singing with him:

Whoop! Whoopee!
Tumble up an' rumble up an' crowd along the bars;
Punch a little, loaf a little, hit your pace an' roam!
An' me, I'll be ropin' the Big Bear up in the stars;
My Ol' Man in the Up Yonder has ordered me,
"Come Home!"

Again there came silence, heavy, ominous silence. It threatened in its very lack of warning. They had laughed at him, they had, in a spirit not entirely foreign to his, sung with him, and he knew that they had drawn nearer. And now it was their business to kill him, to send him along that last trail; it was his business to kill them if he could, so that that ride might not be lonely.

Then, suddenly, the silence was broken by a snapping volley of pistol shots and the rattle of bullets against door and walls. Babe Deveril saved his ammunition and while he saved it picked up the song again:

OH!—I'm ready to ride, hell-bent, on the trail,
On the Home Range where a fence-post is made with a star;
The las' trail, the steep trail, the cowpuncher's trail
When he's downed his las' drink with his pals at the bar.

OH!—the sun'll come up an' the sun'll go down,
An' the boys'll hit town after work on a spree.
But me, I'm gone on where the ranges are wide,
Where a man can ride hard an' ride far an' ride free!

And, as another volley of shots came and the bullets tore their way through the door and window and chinks in the walls, throwing splinters in his face, he took up the chorus, and as before the voices of Temlock's men joined in lustily with him:

Whoop! Whoopee!
Tumble up an' rumble up an' crowd along the bars;
Punch a little, loaf a little, hit your pace an' roam!
An' me, I'll be ropin' the Big Bear up in the stars;
My Ol' Man in the Up Yonder has ordered me,
"Come Home!"

"HELLO, Babe! Feelin' fine?" came a deep voice from outside. "You ol' son-of-a-gun, what did you want to go an' get mixed up in this for?"

"That you, Woods?" returned Deveril carelessly. "I sort of thought you'd gone crooked. Better keep back a little or I might hurt you by mistake," and he fired through the window in the direction of the voice.

Woods answered, first with a revolver, then by saying:

"Stop any of that? Say, Babe, your Ol' Man won't know you when you get back to the Home Range, you'll be all mussed up so!"

"I was just wonderin'," retorted Deveril, shifting his rifle to his left hand and returning revolver shot for Woods, "if you boys were goin' to let me die of slow starvation here!"

Woods laughed and remarked to the man at his side:

"He's a game little devil, ain't he, huh?"

And then it grew silent again. Deveril, his eyes flitting ceaselessly from door to window, his ears straining for any little sound to tell him where a man was coming cautiously nearer, to give him a hope of firing a shot that would find its mark.

"Temlock'll be gettin' tired of this," thought Deveril. "And it isn't Crag Verilees' way of doin' business to wait all week. Something's goin' to break in a minute."

And he reached a searching hand for the little cupboard in the corner near him, found a biscuit, made cowpuncher-style that morning, a bit of cold meat, and gnawed at them hungrily while he waited.

"A man might as well die comfortable," he thought. "And——"

Digitized by Google

He whipped up his revolver and fired through the square of the window at a shifting shadow. A little muffled cry told him that he had not missed this time.

"That you, Woods?" he asked joyously, swallowing a bit of meat so that he could speak.

"No," came Woods' voice from a point further to the right. "That's Andy. Hurt much, Andy?"

Andy's cursing voice told him to "go to ——" and Andy's revolver spat flame and lead back through the window.

"I'm out of luck tonight!" laughed Deveril. "But I never did have much luck shootin' coyotes in the dark!"

Then he heard the sound he had been listening for so long, the little noise that told him a man had crept close, very close to him from the side. He sat still, listening, trying to be certain that he had correctly located the noise.

It sounded as if a man were on the roof. But how could that be? He would have heard him before, when he climbed up the side of the dugout. The noise came again, and he knew. It was against the wall, just behind him, and close up to the roof. There was a long crack there, he had seen it many a time when he and Marian Lee had been here together. The man knew of it, was creeping up to it to thrust a revolver through, to get him when next he fired and the flame from his gun showed his position.

Slowly Babe Deveril got to his feet. He knew that the slight sound he had heard was the scraping of a gun-barrel against the wood as it was pushed through the crack. He drew a step closer, his eyes seeking for the tiny opening. But it was too dark, too black outside.

"I'll have to guess again," he told himself sternly. "And it'll be bad business for me if I guess wrong."

Then, when he thought that he had found the place, he pushed both revolvers out in front of him, finding a chink between the logs just below the spot where he thought the crack to be, and as he moved them he fired both together. There was an explosion just above his head, a scream from the outside wall and the sound of a heavy body falling heavily.

"If it was only Temlock!" he muttered aloud.

But it was not. For a moment later he heard Temlock's heavy voice calling a curt command to his men to fall back a little for consultation. There would be a quick shifting of the campaign and Deveril tried to see, as he crouched there in the quiet darkness, what it could be.

He had wounded Temlock with his first shot of the evening, but not badly. He had scratched Andy, but Andy had been able to shoot back. He had hit that other man who had stolen up to the dugout wall and had, perhaps, put him out of the fight. Still there were perhaps a dozen men out there to be reckoned with. Now they were drawing together to take orders from Temlock; Temlock had worked out his plan and smashing action would come swiftly.

"And I'm to wait here like Mr. Rat in his hole until they get ready to blow me to thunder!" grunted Deveril disgustedly. "Not if I know it!"

He moved swiftly and noiselessly to the front of the small room, quietly lowered the bar from the door, opened the door inch by inch until it had swung back a foot or more, keeping his body protected by the heavy panel lest Temlock had left a man to watch for this thing. But, a dark blot against the dark night, he made out the forms of Temlock's men gathered close together.

"If they're goin' to do any secret plottin'," muttered Deveril as he opened the door another cautious six inches, "they're goin' a lot farther away to do it!"

He went down on one knee, knowing that in the darkness they would have a tendency to shoot high, and as fast as he could work lever and pull trigger he poured six shots into the compact shadow.

A bellowing yell of rage—it was Temlock's unmistakable voice—was followed by a scream of pain and a volley of curses, and an accompanying volley of rifle and pistol shots. Babe grunted disgustedly as he felt a stinging pain in his arm, cursed joyously when he told himself that it was only his left arm, anyhow, and only a flesh wound, shoved his rifle back behind him into the dugout and began emptying his revolver at the dim, blurred, scattering shapes.

"That'll make you hunt your holes, you pack of coyotes!" he called gaily to them, the pain in his arm forgotten in the joy of pelting lead after the scampering shapes.

And being part daredevil and all cowboy in all that the good word connotes, his fighting blood hot in him, his youth rampant, his recklessness unleashed, as he fired he

Digitized by Google

broke again into his rollicking song, pauses punctuated by pistol shots.

OH!—I'm shot full of holes, I'm drippin' with gore,
I'm a ramblin' ol' puncher who's done his las' spree!
I've rode my las' trail like a son-of-a-gun,
An' now I'll ride hard an' ride far an' ride free!

XIV

AT LAST the solid ebon blackness of the night was broken a little. A high wind had torn here and there a rift in the cloud-bank above. A pale moon and dim stars threw a faint, ghostly light into the hidden valley.

The firing had ceased. Temlock's men, those of them whom Babe Deveril's lead had not struck deep, watched the dugout as the darkness thinned. There had come no answering fire to their last. There was a stillness as of the stillness of death over the tiny cabin. But they were suspicious and they held back, ready at a sign to begin again their swift firing.

"He might be playin' possum," snarled Crag Verilees. "An' then he oughta be dead."

"The door's shet," returned Temlock, frowning into the murk of the night. "He's gone back inside, anyway. Mos' likely he's playin' possum."

He lifted his rifle as he spoke and poured a stream of lead into the door. There came no answer from within. And then . . . .

Suddenly the silence that had followed Temlock's shots and short words was broken by a chorus of yells, the wild yells of cowboys riding into a fight, the *thud-thud-thud* of flying hoofs drawing up from the south, and above the sudden uproar a lusty voice shouting:

"Hol' the fort, Babe! We got 'em on the run!"

Stet Davis's voice came ringing like a clarion through the night; Stet Davis himself came riding at the head of twenty cowboys, racing down upon Temlock and Crag Verilees and the rest like a veritable cyclone of wrath and destruction. And then the dugout door snapped open and Babe Deveril leaped outside, his voice lifted joyously to Stet's:

"Come on, you old son-of-a-gun! You're sure welcome!"

Still the wind bore back the clouds, still the darkness thinned, and Deveril, standing straight and shooting fast, could see men everywhere running toward their group of horses.

But already the horses, frightened long ago at the din of the battle, were plunging and dragging at the bridle-reins by which a couple of Temlock's men were striving to hold them. They fought hard now as the new sounds tore through the night; they pulled back, pitching, rearing and kicking as their masters ran to them, as from the south the crowd of cowboys bore down toward them, shouting and shooting.

And now the men holding them had more thought of their own personal safety than for the safety of their companions. A very little margin lay between each one of them and a quick death, and they knew it.

Babe Deveril, firing at each running figure that his eyes could pick out from the darkness, saw that many of the horses had broken loose and were running free, with flapping stirrups and reins whipping about their forelegs. He saw a man yonder catch a swinging bridle-rein, jerk the horse about and swing up into the saddle. He saw the mass of his friends bearing down on them, saw that mass thin and widen as they spread out to cut off the wild flight of the rustlers.

And then he saw Temlock and Verilees, not twenty steps from him. He knew them from their great bodies and from their voices. And he raised his revolver, took steady aim at the taller form, and heard the dull snap of the hammer as it fell on an empty cartridge.

But before he could drop the gun and jerk with his one good hand at the other in his belt, he saw something which held his arm. Temlock had caught at a horse running by him and his gripping hand had found the reins, had brought the animal to a snorting, terrified halt. There was not another riderless horse that Deveril could see. And Crag Verilees was at Temlock's side.

There was a chance for one—a chance for escape in the darkness, for a wild ride that might bring safety if the flying lead missed him. Temlock saw a lost game and saw the one chance; Crag Verilees saw the one chance as Temlock saw it, and already his hand had gone with Temlock's to the whipping reins.

"Let go, you fool!" shouted Temlock, his voice harsh with rage.

Digitized by Google

But Crag Verilees did not let go. Nor did Temlock call to him again. It was each man for himself now and scant enough hope for any man. Temlock's revolver was in his left hand. He raised it swiftly.

Deveril saw the glint of the starlight on the polished barrel. Crag Verilees saw and his own revolver, ready in the iron grip of his right hand, did not come above his hip as he fired.

The two men were still clinging to the reins; there was not three feet between their big, panting bodies. And there was no measureable fraction of time between the two pistol shots.

The horse jerked, broke away from a weakening grasp and ran free, snorting its terror. Temlock and Crag Verilees did not fire a second shot. They were lying close together, very still when Stet Davis threw himself down at Babe Deveril's side.

"Good God!" cried Deveril. "Did you see that, Stet? Temlock and Verilees—they have killed each other!"

"The firs' time in their lives either one of 'em ever did a decent thing!" said Stet Davis sternly.

Then he turned from them as if he had forgotten them, as perhaps he had; turned to Babe Deveril and slowly put out his hand.

"I WAS a fool the other day," he said quietly. "You know what I mean. It was because I was sore, Babe, an'——"

"Forget it, Stet!" cried Babe, gripping the proffered hand. "We were both kids and——"

"An'," went on Stet hurriedly, to have the thing over with, "it was because I was jealous. I heard her talkin' to Mother Mary about you, an'—oh, ——, Babe! What's the use wastin' good time? If I was you I'd take a horse an' burn the earth gettin' back to the Fryin' Pan. She's awaitin' for you, I think, Babe."

Babe, suddenly losing the words which he wanted, stammered something unintelligible.

"Oh, shut up!" said Stet, giving his hand a final hearty squeeze. "Get ready to do some ridin'. There's two mighty fine ladies back to the Fryin' Pan, but one of 'em's lonesome! Mother Mary's so busy bein' happy that Charlie's back—an' I guess he's come to stay, havin' took a brace an' swore he'd travel straight if us boys would give him the show—an' oh shucks! Babe, why don't you hit the trail?"

And Babe Deveril, having taken time to shift a certain pocket-book from Temlock's pocket to his own, found a horse and hit the trail.

"I'll tear up the evidence against Ellston," he thought. "Marian need never know."

"An' me," muttered Stet Davis, looking a little wistfully after his departing friend, "why, I'll jus' nacherally buy that hundred-dollar fiddle for a weddin' present!"

Whereupon he sighed and made a cigarette and then went out to meet Ches Mann.

"Where's Babe?" asked Ches quickly. "Ain't hurt much, is he?"

"Nope," returned Stet cheerfully. "Not much, I guess. Jus' shot right square through the heart, that's all!"

And Ches Mann laughed understandingly.

Digitized by Google

A GAMBLE IN GEESE

A TALE OF DAWSON DAYS

By Samuel Alexander White

Author of "Proof," "The Azoic Law," etc.

JUST at the junction of Clear Creek with the Stewart River, a Peterborough canoe whirled 'round and 'round in the same spot. But, although Clear Creek was throwing more than its usual volume of water, it was not the eddies caused by the meeting of the two streams which gave to the canoe its circular motion. It was instead the cross purposes of the two men in it that produced the phenomenon.

Eric Sark in the stern was striving mightily with his paddle to drive the craft on down the Stewart, while Tom Bassett in the bow, backwatering with his blade, labored as mightily to force the Peterborough up Clear Creek. In the violent paddle-strokes one man's strength just about matched the other's, and the inevitable result was that onward progress was neutralized and the canoe became a crazy, gyrating thing without power or direction.

Bound off the McQuesten River, where they had wintered, trying out some barren claims, their common destination was Dawson City, but the trouble arose over their views on the routes that reached it. Sark could see no highway of travel but the orthodox one, down the Stewart to its junction with the Yukon and on down the Yukon to Dawson, and he insistently endeavored to force his comrade into it.

"Oh quit it, Tom!" he appealed, half in laughter, half in exasperation. "Quit it and let's get on!"

"I won't," defied Bassett stubbornly. "It's like goin' outa your back-door and 'round the world to git into your front-door. Ninety miles from here to the Stewart's mouth, seventy more to Dawson—one hundred and sixty miles—and via Clear Creek and the Klondike River it kin't be much more'n a third of that. I tell you, Eric, I won't stand for it! I ain't so fond of petrifyin' my back, wearin' out thwarts with my thighs and ossifyin' my knees and ankles as to paddle a hundred miles outa my way. Thar's an inch of my sweat on the bottom of the canoe now, and pretty soon I'd jist have to sit and bail. Ain't you got any sense? Don't you know it's Summer and one hundred and sixty-nine degrees Fahrenheit in the sun?"

"I know," admitted Sark, "but I'd sooner paddle under it than portage under it. Clear Creek's no boulevard, especially up at the head. There's a jumble of pools and lakes beyond. We'll have to wallow through a lot of muck and marsh."

"Plagued leetle wallowin' thar'll be.

Digitized by Google

Look how high the water is. We kin skim them marshes, Eric, jist like skipper-bugs. And, most important thing of all, we'll find somethin' fit for a white man to eat. Young, tender, juicy wild geese, pardner. Thunder! The thought of 'em makes my mouth water!"

"So it's your stomach that's bothering you! I might have known that. For I've found out, Tom, that all your actions are governed by two motives. If it isn't money you're after, it's something to eat. Funny, too, I didn't figure it out from your dog-gone rabidness!"

"Now, pardner, don't brand me mercenaree because I have a sense of money values and an eye to opportunity. And don't call me gourmandistick because I've a longin' for a fowl supper. We've lived on beans and sowbelly for months. If I let you go down the Stewart, we'd chaw on some more of the same till we got to Dawson. So I ain't lettin' you. I rebel. I fight for my rights and my——"

"Palate!"

"All right, if you will have it that way! But we're turnin' up Clear Creek jist the same. Swing in, Eric, unless you wanta spin 'round here till the freeze-up comes in the Fall!"

WITH a despairing grunt, Sark gave in and sheered the Peterborough to the right into the mouth of Clear Creek. Immediately Tom Bassett caught the time of the stroke, and, both paddles now dipping in unison, the partners worked up-creek past low, gravelly limits, past clay-cut banks and terraced benches.

As Sark had contended, Clear Creek was no boulevard. They had to pole and tow as well as portage before they left its dwindling headwaters at noon of the blazing midsummer day and toiled up the shaly benchland to the rugged divide, lying like a barrier between the Klondike and the Stewart Valleys and shedding waters from its slopes down into either basin.

Amid a plague of mosquitoes, they portaged over the uneven face of the divide to a small lake, crossed the lake, and half-ran, half-dragged their canoe through a boggy inlet at its head to a second and larger lake.

This larger lake they did not cross but, skirting its south shore for a few miles, passed out a narrow western arm and portaged again over a low ridge to the country drained by the head tributaries of Flat Creek. Here on the Klondike, as on the Stewart slope, the water was unusually high for the time of year, and about the partners stretched a sweep of marsh and muskeg, of shallow pool and weedy channel.

Like tinsel cuttings on black velvet the straggling upland waters lay framed by niggerhead swamps. Fringing the waters and dividing them into a thousand sections, wild grasses rioted waist-high; reeds, sedges, and bog plants shot overhead; and, banking all, leaned the low willows, clutching their roots like long, tenuous toes in the ooze and muck.

It was ten o'clock at night. The sun burned high above the horizon, painting the marsh waters with a blood-red hue, and over land and water brooded intense calm—a calm strangely intensified by the weak piping of frogs and the thin whine of millions of mosquitoes.

"Dead as a vault!" whispered Bassett, pausing with the canoe on his head at the edge of the marsh. "Never a quack or honk, Eric! Mebbe I ain't goin' to eat my fowl supper arter all. Mebbe it'll be frogs' legs with skeeter salad."

He dropped the canoe into the water with an experimental splash, and instantly the sedge near at hand waked to life. There sounded a frantic scuttering, a queer, immature honking. The water boiled with swift commotion, and the reeds swayed violently.

"Thunderation! They are here, too!" Bassett sprang into the bow of the canoe. "Hop in, pardner! Quick! Don't let 'em git away!"

Sark dropped the packs on the ground and shoved off from the stern. The paddles dashed in. The canoe crashed into the reeds, and the triumphant Bassett held up in either hand a part-grown Canada goose.

"Git to shore, Eric!" he howled exultingly. "Git to shore and light a fire, or I'll be eatin' 'em raw!"

At the sound of his ringing voice a big bull moose rose like an apparition out of the muck ahead and sped floundering past them at an angle for the land. And ahead and behind and on all sides, startled by the tumultuous crashing and splashing of the fleeing black bulk, wild fowl shot up in flocks. The whole marsh quaked with the scuttering of the young who could not yet fly, while the upper air vibrated to the beating wings of the old.

Digitized by Google

The rattle of the reeds from which they rose, the roar of their crowded pinions, and their clamorous honking ripped and tore the uncanny silence which but a moment before had filmed all things. Black against the swollen sun and the crimson northwest sky they slanted and wheeled, driving 'round and 'round and crying the age-old call for the broods to rise.

But the hour was not come for the goslings' winging. They hid in the grasses and honked back out of key so that their answers seemed only muffled echoes of the clarion sounds above.

FOR an hour the confusion continued. Several times wedges bored down and came to rest when another flock, sweeping by, would discover something suspicious in Sark's and Bassett's fire and raise the alarm. Whereupon the old geese would leap aloft again and fill the clouds with wings.

Tom Bassett, gorging himself on delectable portions of goose-flesh roasted on sticks over the coals, watched the ever-changing aerial procession with meditative eyes. When he felt that he could not stuff another shred under his trousers band without causing disaster to his dangerously stretched epidermis, he lay back by the camp-fire and wiped his greasy hands on the grass.

"It's settled, pardner!" he sighed with the gravity of one who makes a momentous announcement.

"Your stomach? I thought it was about time."

"Nope, Eric! My goose-farm!"

"Your what?"

"My goose-farm. Your hearin' decrepit?"

"No, but my credulity is. What in thunder is a goose-farm?"

"Why, a farm whar you farm geese. What else could it be?"

"I thought it might be an enclosure for the feeble-minded. I know what's the matter, Tom. It's been a furnace-hot day. You got a touch of sunstroke. I'd better dig in and doctor you."

Sark started to get up from his seat on the other side of the fire, but Bassett plucked forth a blazing brand and motioned him back.

"No you hadn't, pardner," he warned coolly. "It ain't sunstroke I've got. It's only a new ideer."

"I'd just as soon—yes I'd sooner have sunstroke than that idea."

"No, you wouldn't. Least you won't when I've explained her."

"Say, Tom, your appetite's big. I'll admit that, but you yourself mistake the size of it in this proposition. Even a mastodon turned carnivorous couldn't eat all the geese on a goose-farm."

"I ain't wantin' to eat 'em. I'll not sink teeth in a single one of them geese. They'll be farmed for sale."

"So it's money you're after this time?"

"It sure is, but you don't need to share the profits. You don't need to come in at all on the deal unless you're willin'. I kin go it my lonely."

"No, you can't either. We're partners. Whatever you go into, we both go into. If you went in for shearing live porcupines to manufacture toothpicks, I'd back you all the same. But this goose-grease deal——"

"Hold on! I ain't sayin' a word about grease. I said goose."

"Well, this goosey deal is a fanatic's scheme. It's outside our profession. We're not farmers. We're legitimate prospectors."

"Yes, and we've bin a lot of other things in our time. We've bin pretty nearly everythin' from transportation magnates to townsite owners, and why kin't we be goose farmers for the minnit, if it's goin' to fill our pockets?"

"We can be goose farmers if—that's the point, Tom, if. You better show me how it's going to sag my pocket. Where's your farm? Where are your goose-eggs? Who's going to hatch them?"

"Eggs! Hatch!" snorted Bassett derisively. "What you talkin' about? What you got into your head—tame, barnyard geese?"

"Sure. What else?"

"The geese on my goose-farm are wild!" Tom shouted. "Wild! Do you git that? I don't need any eggs. I don't need any incubator, feathered, glassed or otherways. The geese is half-growed already. We've jist picked the bones of two of 'em."

Sark leaned back with understanding and satisfaction.

"Now I hear something," he grinned. "Why didn't you say wild geese at first?"

"Why ain't you waitin' and givin' me a chanct? It's easy money. All we got to do is ketch the youngsters, lug 'em down to Dawson and enclose 'em whar thar's good

Digitized by Google

grazin'. They'll do the rest. Them geese, Eric, will jist be walkin' pokes of gold by the time they're ready for the Christmas market."

"They'll take some catching, won't they?"

"We'll git help. Thar's a Stick Indian camp not far down the Flat Creek Valley. We'll hire the bucks tomorrow and plunge right into the game. We'll have to git an early start, so we better roll up for bed now." Tom kicked off his moccasins and pulled a blanket under him to lie upon. "But hold on, though! I mean I'll do all that. You kin snooze on the proposition, pardner, and tell me in the mornin' if you're in. Mind, I ain't forcin' you or even requestin' you. You sleep on it, and ripen your decision."

"I don't need to sleep on it," returned Sark, following his comrade's move for bed. "I'll get it off my mind before I start to sleep, and I'll rest all the better. I'll tell you right now—I'm in."

THE next day saw Bassett's hired Stick bucks from Flat Creek at work. Their canoes scored the face of the marsh. Back and forth and from end to end of it they dashed, brown arms and bodies glistening in the sun, skimming the open spaces and charging into the reeds, and always their dashes were sure and certain and productive of reward. While the old guard clanged above them in indignation and despair, the Indians skilfully scooped the young geese off the clear water, plucked them forth from the tangled weeds and dragged them out of the concealing muck itself. For three days and a half they worked before Bassett called a halt.

"'Bout enough, Eric, ain't it?" he asked, when the Sticks desisted.

"Must be," Sark replied. "We've an even thousand now. The bucks have nearly cleaned out the marsh, and there's no use going farther afield."

"Sure no use, pardner! Too many would be as bad as none. It would knock the bottom outa the market. 'Sides, a thousand is the limit we kin graze. We'll have to feed 'em grain when the frost comes, and we don't want a horde eatin' up all the profits. One thousand's full plenty. The next thing's to git 'em down to Dawson. What'll we use—the Stick canoes?"

"We'll have to use them down to the Klondike River, but after that I think we'd better raft the birds. They'll ride better. What do you think, Tom?"

"They'll ride a lot better," agreed Bassett. "Raft it is, then. Tell them Indians to load up and bring their axes to cut logs."

The geese were confined in crates of willow withes, woven by the Stick Indians, and with these crates aboard their canoes the bucks escorted Sark and Bassett down to the mouth of Flat Creek where it emptied into the Klondike River.

There a great raft was built. The crates were piled on top of it, together with the Peterborough canoe, and, steering the raft with long oars made of poles with short boards set in the ends, the partners waved good-by to the Sticks and drifted downstream.

The Sticks had proved good allies in the undertaking, and Sark and Bassett would willingly have retained some of them as caretakers on the wild-goose farm they proposed to establish at Dawson, only Tagish Jim, their Chilcat foreman, was in the golden city with his complement of men awaiting their coming and their report regarding the McQuesten claims, and they knew that they were already assured of sufficient help.

So, working the raft alone, they drifted on without mishap down past the North Fork and Rock Creek to Dawson at the Klondike's mouth.

ONCE arrived there, Bassett went up to see the Commissioner on necessary business, while Sark enlisted the services of Tagish Jim and his Chilcats and held on across the river to West Dawson, on the other bank. There on the flat along the Yukon they enclosed a belt of grassland with a closely-built fence of slabs, floated across from the Dawson saw-mill. This fence was made in twelve-foot sections latched together, and for it no post-holes were dug. Instead of post-holes short pieces in the form of X were nailed on the bottom of each post. Thus the fence stood upright solidly enough, yet was movable, so that fresh grazing ground might be enclosed from time to time.

Into the enclosure the one thousand wild geese were turned. A crumpled, bedraggled lot they looked at first, but once they got room to move and feed and preen, their plumage smoothed down and they held up alert heads again.

Digitized by Google

When they were all duly enclosed, Bassett appeared, shears in hand, to perform an obvious duty. But Tagish Jim, who from first sight of these prisoned *voyageurs* of the skies had appointed himself their lord and keeper, interposed.

"What do with um shears?" he demanded.

"Clip their wings, on course!"

"No, no!" protested Tagish. "No need um clip. You spoil um look, spoil um health. Um not do so well. Um not make big market with wings clip. Me show you better way. No clip; no spoil. Um much easy way, too."

He captured a healthy specimen, turned it into the hollow of his arm and under the observant eye of Bassett pulled certain feathers from its wings and tail.

"Um no fly now, but um grow all same. You clip wings, you stop um grow well."

"But the feathers'll grow in agin, and they'll fly jist the same."

"Mebbe grow by time you ready kill um. But um not fly all Summer, and um won't know um can fly. Savvy? Um never try. Stay here; grow well; you market um."

"All right, Tagish, have it your way, but mind if I see your theory ain't goin' to work, if I see 'em hankerin' arter sky flights, I'm bound to clip!"

"Um work," declared the Chilcat confidently. "Me try um often on um Old Crow River up by um Porcupine."

And the theory did work. From attempting a thousand futile flights throughout the Summer months, the geese arrived by some savage inductive power at the belief that they were permanently destined to earth, and in the Fall when wings as well as bodies had fully developed, this belief still held. Now that flight was possible to them, they did not try. Gradual taming, no doubt, had a great deal to do with their attitude, but the ingrained remembrance of their many vain essays was in the main responsible.

It was this phenomenon as much as ordinary curiosity that brought the Dawsonites across to inspect the wild-goose farm. They came daily and in crowds, sitting smoking upon Sark's and Bassett's fence, watching the lordly stalking of the birds, concocting colossal lies of goose-hunts resulting in bigger bags than the one before them, idly throwing down pocketfuls of grain to see the geese fall over each other for the prize and secretly attempting to stampede them into flight.

WITH these visitors one day came Casino Charlie, who, using Dawson as his headquarters, was gambling heavily in creek claims in an effort to recoup his losses over the townsite of Charpentier. Sark and Bassett had not seen him since vanquishing him in that deal, but now they hailed him in good fellowship, treated him to refreshments in the temporary cabin thrown up on the farm and took him out to see the feathered stock.

"What's the game?" Casino inquired, surveying them with a covetous eye. "You breedin' them for a zoo or somethin' like that?"

"Nope, for the Christmas market," Bassett told him.

"Straight?"

"Straight!"

"I heard you was, but I didn't believe it when they told me you hadn't clipped their wings. I guessed they was for some preserve or zoo and they wouldn't sell mutilated."

"You guessed wrong, Casino. You'll eat one of them fowl for your Christmas dinner, if you have the coin. It'll cost you jist twenty dollars. They'll average ten pounds each, them birds, and geese in Dawson on Christmas Eve'll be two dollars a pound. Nobody'll git 'em for any less, for thar won't be no geese but ours on the market. Savvy?"

"That's robbery!" protested Casino. "Twenty dollars for one of them geese! Twenty thousand for the lot! It's worse than robbery. It's plumb extortion!"

"Call it what you like, it goes! 'Less you've twenty dollars to spend, you won't be chewin' savory goose and dressin' on Christmas Day."

"The price is moderate anyway," Sark pointed out. "Moosemeat's selling right now for a dollar a pound. Everything's high this Fall, Casino, and two dollars a pound for fowl, when there wouldn't have been any fowl but for our foresight, isn't out of the way."

"Out of the way! It's stark sky-hikin'!" exploded the indignant Casino. "It's an outrage, a hold-up, a pistol muzzle in everybody's ear. I for one won't stand for it. I tell you right now I won't pay any such price."

Digitized by Google

Casino went off in a huff toward his boat lying at the Yukon's edge, but before he reached it, he turned and shook a prophetic finger.

"I won't pay it," he repeated, "but I'll have my Christmas goose all the same. Yes, I don't mind tellin' you I'll have half them thousand geese just for your show of greed and impudence. What's more, I'll have them for nothin' or know the reason why."

"You will, eh?" jeered Bassett. "Well, if that ideer's obsessin' you bad and you think you're man enough or if you think you kin scrape together men enough to confiscate one or the half or the hull of this outfit, why, all I gotta say is—come right along and do it."

Casino came all right, at morning, but alone with fire in his eye and a copy of the game laws in his hand.

"I been layin' for you fellows ever since you queered me on that Charpentier townsite business," he announced aggressively, "and now I've got you cornered. You goin' to share them thousand geese with me?" He significantly shook the copy of the Game Laws.

"We're not philanthropists," Sark mildly informed him, "and if we did decide to give away ten thousand dollars, we'd bestow it on some worthy object. What's that you got in your hand? Your time-book?"

"No, yours! It's likely to give you ten years. You took them birds in the close season. Listen here!" Casino opened his book, ran his finger down to a section he had underlined and commenced to read:

"'Under the ordinance respecting the preservation of game in the Yukon Territory and amendments thereto, the close seasons, within which the undermentioned beasts and birds shall not be hunted, taken, killed, shot at, wounded, injured or molested in any way, are as follows, namely: . . . . . wild swans, wild ducks, wild geese, snipe, sand-pipers or cranes, between June the first and August the tenth.'

"Assimilate that, you geezers? You weren't aware, were you, that they'd wished game laws on this back country? Here's some more of it: 'Eggs on the nests of any of the birds mentioned or any species of wild fowl, shall not be taken, destroyed, injured or molested at any time of the year.' Get that broad statement? You're liable on that score, and you're also liable on another.

"Listen again: 'No one shall enter into any contract or agreement with or employ any Indian or any other person, whether such Indian or other person is an inhabitant of the country to which this ordinance applies or not, to hunt, kill or take contrary to the provisions of the ordinance, any of the beasts or birds mentioned.'

"Also, boys, hear what happens to them: 'Any beast, bird or eggs in respect to which any conviction has been made shall be held to be thereby confiscated.' You'd look sweet, wouldn't you, havin' them thousand geese worth twenty dollars apiece confiscated by the Dawson authorities? And you'd look sweet, wouldn't you, facin' a fine of twenty dollars for each and every one of them?

"Twenty thousand dollars, and imprisonment in default of payment! How does it sound to you? Now do I come in half shares on this deal and keep a shut mouth or do I go back to Dawson and jog the memory of the game-wardens? It doesn't matter much which I do. It means ten thousand dollars for me either way. Because listen what it says about the fines: 'In the case of a conviction one-half of the fine shall be paid to the informer.' So hurry up and tell me which I'll do."

"You'll do neither, you cold-blooded blackmailer," flared Sark. "Let me see that book a minute."

He took it roughly out of Casino's hands and turned over a few pages.

"YOU'RE not so smart as you figure, Casino," Eric sneered, "and you jump to conclusions like a mountain goat. I'll try the quoting stunt and see how it goes. Just memorize this: 'Beasts or birds may be lawfully taken, hunted or killed and eggs of any birds or other wild fowl may be taken during the close season only: By explorers, surveyors, prospectors, miners or travelers who are engaged in any exploration, survey or mining operation, or other examination of the territory, and are in actual need of the beasts, birds or eggs for food.'

"Savvy that, Casino? When we got those geese, we were just off the McQuesten River, legitimate prospectors engaged in mining operation. We were in actual need of the birds, and what we killed up there between

Digitized by Google

the Stewart and the Klondike, we killed for food."

"Yes, sir, I kin take my oath on that," supported Bassett. "We was starvin', Casino, piteously starvin', and we et what we cooked to the very last scrap."

"Well, mebbe you did. I can't prove you didn't, but that doesn't dispose of this thousand in plain view."

"I'll dispose of them in a minute," Sark retorted. "Here's the next section, bearing on that: 'By any person who has a permit to do so granted under the subsequent provisions of the ordinance: (*a*) To whom a permit has been issued to take or kill, for scientific purposes, or to take with a view to domestication, any number, to be fixed by the commissioner, of each of the said beasts or birds, except buffalo and bison.' You mark those words, Casino? 'With a view to domestication!' That's what's going on here, and we got license to do it."

"Bluff!" sneered Casino. "I'll bet you ain't got license for one single feather."

"Show him the permit, Tom!"

Bassett drew forth an official-looking document and spread it open for Casino's perusal.

"Thar she is, and thar's the number fixed by the Commissioner—one thousand. You know very well, Casino, that Eric and me's law-abidin' men, and game laws hold good for us jist the same as any other laws. You surely didn't think we had gall enough to move contrary to the provisions of that ordinance and lay ourselves open to that amount of fines, did you?"

"You got gall enough for anything!" blurted Casino, wrathy over his rebuff.

"Then I got gall enough to make you swaller them words!" Bassett threw back.

He jammed the permit into his pocket and promptly reached for Casino, but Casino precipitately retreated. He kept accelerating his retreat before Bassett's determined rush, took a flying leap into his boat and escaped by a bare yard.

"Good luck for him that boat wasn't stuck very fast in the silt!" Bassett panted as he came back from the chase. "If I'd 'a' got my hands on him, I sure would 'a' soused the sucker. Gall! Talkin' about the gall of us! Say, pardner, I see as plain as the scar on Moosehide Mountain that we're goin' to have trouble with him. You tell Tagish Jim to stay right on top of his job and make the Chilcats keep watch at nights. Thar's no tellin' what dodge Casino'll be up to next."

BASSETT was right. From that moment the troubles on their goose-farm began. Casino, without the grace of an ultimatum, declared guerilla war upon the outfit. Supported by his chief lieutenants Ante Baker and Gunboat Kane, he tried a hundred nefarious schemes, from stealing the geese by night to pot-shooting at them by day from the high bench-ground back of the river flat.

But Sark and Bassett were always on the alert, and Tagish Jim and every other man of the Chilcats guarded the birds as if they had been pokes of gold. The hours that Casino spent plotting to despoil, Sark and Bassett spent devising checkmating plans. They waged the fight, in view of the challenge Bassett had thrown out, on their own strength and merit and without calling in the Mounted Police. They matched their versatile wits against Casino's animal cunning and repulsed him time after time, till they had all Dawson hanging on the final outcome and wagering huge sums that Casino would beat them in the end.

From the viewpoint of outsiders every advantage seemed with the attackers, yet in reality only two of Casino's attempts gave Sark and Bassett any anxiety.

The first took place in the latter part of September, after a cessation in the warfare which had lasted some days. Tagish Jim who was day sentinel at the river's edge was scanning the Dawson shore through Sark's field-glasses when he spotted a boat shoving off. For a moment the Chilcat observed it closely. Then he stalked up to Sark's and Bassett's cabin.

"Um come," he announced briefly. "Boat and three mans. Casino, Ante, Gunboat!"

"What they got now, Tagish?" asked Bassett idly. "Broken glass, fish-hooks or pizen?"

"Me not know. Um got some kind bags."

"Bags! How many bags?"

"Four bags me see um put aboard."

Tom hastily arose.

"Thunder!" he exclaimed. "Mebbe it's powder or dynamite or bombs. Come on, Eric. I know Casino's sure gettin' desperate. He's liable to do anythin' now, even blow up the farm."

Bassett went off on the run down to the

Digitized by Google

river's edge. Sark caught up his Winchester rifle and followed. Casino's boat was only one hundred yards out in the stream and making straight for their bank when Eric stepped up on a boulder and hailed it.

"Lay up those oars a minute," he commanded, raising his rifle. "You got to show what you got in those bags before you land here."

"Show nothing!" yelled Casino. "Do you own the river bank? We'll land where we plagued please."

"Oh, no, you won't! You've tried too many tricks to land on our grazing ground unless we let you."

"Your grazing ground! When'd you buy it? You ain't got title or lease or license to it any more than I have. You're only squattin' on it."

"Well, we'll use squatters' rights if you like it that way. Savvy? You stay off!"

"Ante, Gunboat, dig in them oars!" ordered Casino contemptuously. "That's only bloated bluff."

Ante and Gunboat obediently swung the oars, and as they dipped Sark's rifle cracked.

The drift of the boat had lessened the distance to seventy-five yards. Ante Baker's white oar was a conspicuous mark, and Sark's bullet broke it a foot above the blade. Ante at that moment had thrown his whole weight into the pull. His purchase for the stroke suddenly removed, he somersaulted back into the stern, with his heels wildly kicking the air. After many contortions he arose again, rubbing a huge bump on his head and angrily shaking his fist at Sark.

"You pirate! You barrator!" he roared, and immediately sat down again as the Yukon current whirled the boat around.

"What in tarnation you fellows mean?" demanded Gunboat Kane, standing up and attempting to hold the craft stationary by poling with the other oar.

"Mean?" chuckled Sark. "Isn't my meaning plain enough? You paddle out into midstream mighty quick or I'll make a fly-screen out of your boat."

"Yes," Bassett called out, "you got lyddite in them bags, and you ain't explodin' it here."

"Lyddite!" shrieked Casino. "You're crazy. We ain't fools enough to tote explosives. Ante, Gunboat, show the beggars them bags."

While Ante Baker and Gunboat Kane fumbled for the bags, the boat continued to drift closer to the shore. It was a scant forty yards away when the two men straightened up in their seats with a sack in either of their hands. They had the bags by the bottoms, and without warning they swiftly flipped them overhead and jerked their contents free. From the opened mouths of the four bags four big, live wild geese flew honking over Sark's and Bassett's enclosure!

IN A flash Tom and Eric comprehended the novel game. With an imprecation the latter leveled his rifle at Casino's boat which, with Gunboat pulling his oar on one side and Ante paddling on the other side with a board he had ripped out of the flooring, was making an awkward dash down-stream, out of range. Eric sighted just at the waterline, watching with grim joy the splinters flying as he emptied his magazine, and then ran after his partner.

Tom was sprinting desperately for the goose enclosure and shouting to Tagish Jim as he ran.

"The night-pens!" he howled excitedly. "Tagish, run 'em into the night-pens. Them four'll stampede the hull bunch."

But Tagish Jim only shook his head as he watched with stoic eyes the four honkers circling 'round and 'round.

"No time to run um in," he replied. "No use run um anyway. Um not fly. Wild geese don't fly for um yell. Let um four yell um heads off. Bime-by um come down. Us get um too."

While Sark and Bassett hung in painful anxiety upon the slab fence, the wisdom of the Chilcat was once again demonstrated for them. Standing on their toes and flapping their wings, the one thousand birds on the ground greeted the wheeling four in the sky, but they did not offer to answer the call to rise.

As the partners had heard the brood-call clanged out in vain above the marsh on the divide between the Stewart and Klondike Rivers, so now they heard the flight-call clanged in vain. And soon, as Tagish Jim had foretold, the one thousand decoys too strong a lure to resist, the four slanted down to rest within the enclosure.

Immediately Tagish crawled around on his stomach behind the night-pens, which were built of and roofed over with wire netting, to throw in a little grain, and within

Digitized by Google

two minutes the alien four were singled out and made captives.

Casino, standing up on the seat of his boat out in the river, saw his quartet of geese—for which he had traveled far up the Sixty-mile River and paid Indians fifty dollars to catch by diving in the river and coming up under them as they slept—calmly gathered in by Sark and Bassett. His boat was filling like a punctured pail. Gunboat Kane was pulling for the shore with the one oar.

Ante Baker frantically knifed pieces off his board in a futile attempt to plug the holes. But Casino only pranced on the boat seat, reviling Sark and Bassett till in the midst of his reviling he found himself in water to his neck and floundering landward with Ante and Gunboat.

Bassett greeted their immersion with a triumphant howl.

"Thanks, Casino!" he bawled from the top of the fence as the current cast the dripping trio out on the shore away below the grazing ground. "Thanks for them four. They'll bring eighty dollars on the Christmas market. Your loss, our gain! You see, you made a slight error in your calculations. For, accordin' to an old Chinese proverb that comes to my mind, it's not the cry but the risin' of the wild goose that impels the flock to foller him in his upward flight. And your four didn't rise among ours. They lit."

THE other attempt of Casino which gave Sark and Bassett uneasiness in any marked degree occurred during the first week of October. It was not so spectacular as the plan to stampede the one thousand by freeing others of their kind over their heads, but it worried the partners worse. Moreover, it was artistic in its simplicity.

In the hills back of the bench ground which bordered the river-flat was a water-filled slough. So Casino planted a showing of pay gravel on the bench ground, panned it again and he and Ante and Gunboat staked three claims. Then they ran a ditch from the slough through their claims and drained the water down the slope on to Sark's and Bassett's grazing ground. The October days were sharp with frost. Casino iced the whole flat for them and kept it iced.

This shut off the grass supply, but that was not what bothered the partners. The frost had killed the grass anyhow and blackened it so that it was of little use for feed, and they were already using grain. But their discomfiture sprang from the fact that the flat was uneven in character and had a pronounced slope to the water's edge. So slippery did Casino's deluges render it that the geese could no more navigate it than they could walk a skating-rink set a-tilt. They fell continually, floundered and slid, and every hour Sark and Bassett expected to see them break their legs or their necks.

"What we goin' to do about it, Eric?" asked Tom, when things became so bad that their birds could do nothing but lie on their breasts wherever they found a level spot and try to forget that they ever had legs. "They kin't stand this very long. Their feathers is freezin' to the ice already, and their flesh'll soon git touched and start to fester. We'll lose the hull bunch with gangrene if we don't do somethin' right sharp."

"Let's try sand," suggested Sark.

But as fast as they sanded the ice so that the geese could stand erect and get about, Casino's hill-water swept it off, and when they froze it on with salt by night, he submerged the whole grazing ground with a foot-deep flood. Again and again they tried, and again and again he baffled them.

They crept up one midnight and secretly dammed the outlet to the slough. It froze solidly and shut off the flow, but Casino dug deeper till he was below the frost-line, and after that he kept a fire burning to prevent a second attempt.

"I guess he's got us, Tom," concluded Sark resignedly. "We might as well kill them at once and be done with it."

"No, by thunder, we won't!" vowed Bassett. "It ain't cold enough to kill and freeze 'em for keeps. They'd thaw out some in the daytime and spile. 'Sides, they ain't up to market weight. They got six or seven weeks to feed yit. They kin't go into cold storage till the gen'rul freeze-up."

"But, partner, you sure can't torture them in this fashion till the general freeze-up!"

"Wait, Eric, till I row acrost to Dawson. I have a hunch that'll make Casino look like a ten-spot beside a handful of kings. You build a fire and have her rip-roarin' when I git back."

Sark did as directed, and Bassett rowed

Digitized by Google

back from Dawson with two barrels and a big iron kettle in his boat.

"What you got?" asked Eric. "More salt?"

"Nope, tar."

"Tar?"

"Sure."

"What for?"

"I'll show you in a minnit. How's the fire?"

"Blazing hot, Tom, and then some!"

"All right, pardner, sling that kettle over it. Whar's Tagish Jim? Here, Tagish, bring the men and git busy."

Under Bassett's instructions some of the Chilcats dipped the tar from the barrels into the iron kettle. When it was warm, they dipped it out again and ran it over the bottom of one of the goose-pens. Into the adjoining pen others of the Chilcats were shoveling the coarse sand which Sark and Bassett had been vainly scattering on the ice.

When both pens were carefully prepared, the floundering geese were rounded up and started one at a time through the pens. The moment their feet encountered the tar, they walked erect before the world again. The soft, warm tar thickly encased their feet, and as they traveled on through the second pen, the coarse sand adhered to the tar. Thus, whereas the helpless birds had passed into the pens without proper use of their legs, they now passed out with a covering on their feet that gripped the ice like sandpaper.

For a little the geese stared about at each other in a silly fashion, totally unable to understand this miracle of sound footing. Then they clamorously cackled their appreciation and waddled off to the feeding-troughs.

"Sand-shoes, Eric!" grinned Bassett triumphantly. "Casino kin't beat 'em. The more fresh ice he makes, the better they'll grip, and if they wear out, we kin renew 'em to our hearts' content."

IT WAS not many hours before the story of the sand-shoes went around the golden city. As in the early days of the goose-farm, crowds came across to see. Huger bets than ever were staked on the final outcome, and this coup of Tom Bassett's caused the odds to swing to the partners' side. Many Dawson wags, "Doc" Martin and Solomon Sunday at their head, climbed the bench ground back of the flat and roasted Casino till he fled into retirement.

From that day Casino, Ante and Gunboat dropped out of sight. Dawson City knew them no more. Persecution ceased and peace descended on Sark's and Bassett's farm.

"What's happened to Casino, Tom?" asked Sark, when over a month had passed without sight of, sound of or assault from their ancient enemy. "Is he lying back somewhere to fix us when we've given up looking for him?"

"Either that or he kin't face the ridicool! Solomon and Doc and the rest'd plague him to death if he ever showed up in Dawson. And if he figgers to buck us agin, he'll have to show up mighty sudden. The freeze-up ain't many days away, and as soon as she closes in, we kill!"

That was the first week in November. The freeze-up drew very near. Navigation had ceased on the Lower River. The Upper River still remained open, but mush and floe-ice covered its breast, and the shore-ice extended far out into the stream. This shore-ice, especially along the Dawson bank, had thickened formidably, and for the accommodation of the river steamers, racing the frost from Whitehorse and the poling boats, driving down from distant creeks an open channel had been cut from the steamboat-landing out to free water.

Since the partners' days now held but little excitement, watching these boats make the channel and avoid being jammed in the ice-floes and carried past by the current had become a favorite pastime with Sark and Bassett.

ONE evening at dusk they were occupied in speculating on the chances of a small scow reaching the wharf. The scow was drifting down the Yukon. Three men on it were handling it with sweeps, one man working at either side and one at the stern. A snow-squall was blowing at the time, and whether the squall obscured the channel or whether it was the carelessness or inability of the men, the partners could not see; but whatever the cause, they saw that the scow had missed the channel and missed with plenty of sea-room. The bow of the craft bumped the shore-ice fifty yards below the channel mouth. The scow swung around, stern first.

Digitized by Google

The three men leaned hard on their sweeps, but the floe-ice was upon them, and all they could do was to continue to lean hard and slant their craft across the river to avoid being carried down-stream. On Sark's and Bassett's side they banged through the shore-ice, which, owing to the eddies there, was very thin, and cast up against the flat. Sark hastily threw them a rope and, slipping the end around a boulder, anchored them there.

"Come on ashore and wait," he counseled. "The run of that floe'll be past in a little. Then you'll work across all right."

To the three men it seemed good advice, so they made their end of the rope fast on the scow. They came clambering ashore over the stern, and Sark and Bassett gazed upon the snow-plastered figures of Casino, Ante and Gunboat.

"You wanderin' will-o'-wisps!" Bassett exclaimed. "Whar in thunder you from?"

"From Whitehorse," answered Casino, slapping his arms over his chest to shake off the snow.

"What you got in the scow?" asked Eric.

"Geese," announced Casino.

"Geese?" howled Tom Bassett in alarm. "How many geese?"

"I haven't counted them yet," Casino told him. "I haven't had time. We've been racin' the freeze-up."

"Dead geese, are they?"

"Sure."

"And tame geese, I 'spose?"

"Sure. Dead, tame, plucked, singed and ready for the market. You'll never get a chance, Tom. I have you skinned and boned right now."

"You perserverin' piker!" breathed Bassett, half in admiration. "How'd you do it?"

"By chance," admitted Casino. "I don't mind tellin' you it was nothin' but plumb chance. This is how it was: Ante, Gunboat and me's on Whitehorse wharf when along comes a commission man cursin' the steamboat companies. He has a shipment of Christmas geese just come down over the Pass, and the last boat of the year's sailed for Dawson.

"If he hadn't have wailed out his woes so loud, I mebbe wouldn't have thought much about it. But he takes on so bad that I see a scoop. 'Here,' I says, 'I'll buy them fowl just to shut you up. Your lamentations is sure irritatin'. How much does your silence cost? How many geese you got?' 'I don't know,' he says. 'I ain't got the bill of ladin' yet, but there must be ten or twelve hundred by the look of them.' 'There ain't no time to count,' I says, 'if I take them out of here and beat the freeze-up to Dawson with them. Call it an even thousand, and I'll give you five dollars apiece. Five thousand, that'll let you out. And they're sure not worth as much as toothpicks here. The Whitehorse stores are glutted with them.'

"'Done.' He accepts, just like that. And I paid him the five thousand, and here we are, Tom, and in half an hour we'll be in Dawson. But say, I sure don't want to hit you fellows too hard. You always been fair fighters with a nice sense of humor and a memory only as long as the set-to lasts.

"I'll let you down easy. I'll buy your geese and take a chance on gettin' rid of them. But of course, considerin' my cargo here, I can't pay any such price as you was askin' early on. I can't pay twenty dollars. I'm sellin' mine for ten. They'll break the market, and your lot won't bring more'n four. So I'll give you three dollars and a half apiece for them, boys, and save you the trouble of handlin'."

"Thunderation! That's only thirty-five cents a pound!" protested Bassett.

"Can't help it, Tom. You know that's all they're worth, and mebbe I won't get as much as I figure. Mebbe the market'll fool me, and I'll drop certain cents on each. Three dollars and a half apiece! Are you sellin'?"

"You count yours first, Casino," parleyed Bassett. "We gotta know for sure you have enough to break the market before we sell."

"All right, we'll count them now. We packed them all in the after hold of the scow so that the weight would be behind to keep her from swingin' so much while we drifted. Ante, you jump down there and hand them up. Gunboat, you get into the forehold and pack them there as they come. The weight'll be better in the bow to work across against the current."

The scow was of the drift type which men were accustomed to propel with sweeps. It was decked over, with a solid central bulkhead, forward and after-holds and a hatch for each hold. Gunboat disappeared through the forward and Ante through the after-hatch.

Digitized by Google

"Ready?" Ante asked.

"Sure," answered Casino.

"Ready here, let her go," rumbled Gunboat in the forward hold.

AT ONCE Ante began throwing up the geese, one at a time, fine, fat, white-fleshed, twelve-pound birds, plucked, singed and ready for the market. Casino, sitting between the hatches, caught them as they came and tossed them down to Gunboat. Sark and Bassett, squatting on either side on the deck, kept count and tallied each hundred on a paper. For nearly two hours, while the dark came down and deepened, they sat there in the cold amid the spitting snow squalls, patiently counting and putting pencil to paper.

"That's all!" announced Ante Baker finally.

"Nine hundred and ninety-five," totaled Bassett.

"Same here," checked Sark.

"Only five out," Casino smirked. "Twenty-five dollars gone, but that ain't anythin'. You sure see I've enough to smash the market, boys. You better sell and sell quick. I'm half-frozen, and I'm goin' to hit Dawson now while the river's clear."

"What we goin' to do, Eric? Sell?" Tom asked gloomily.

"What else can we do?" returned Sark. "Three thousand, five hundred dollars'll cover our expenses. That lets us break even. If we hold on, we won't get any more, and we likely stand to lose."

"We sell, then," Bassett decided.

"All right, here's your money." Casino pulled out a wad of bills. "I'll land these dead birds at Dawson now and come back for the rest in the mornin'. You have them stiffened out for me. You know how to fix them, Tom? Don't cut their heads off. Just prick in the side of the neck and bleed them. And leave the feathers on, of course. Wild geese aren't like tame ones. Wild ones need to be skinned, and they don't want to be skinned till they're goin' to be drawn and dressed."

"Oh, I know, sure enough!" nodded Bassett. "I've et more wild geese'n tame ones."

"Well, that's all right, then, and you can just write me a receipt now for the money."

While Sark counted over Casino's money, Bassett wrote the receipt which read: "Received of Casino Charlie three thousand five hundred dollars in payment for one thousand wild geese to be delivered in the morning." Then both dropped ashore. Casino cast off, and the scow was forced out into mid-river.

As it disappeared in the dark, Eric, who was watching it curiously, turned to his partner.

"Tom!" he exclaimed, a note of alarm in his voice. "Tom, I don't like the way that scow rides!"

"What's the matter with her? She seems seaworthy. Don't worry, pardner. They'll git acrost all right. They's no floes runnin' jist now."

"Still, I don't like the way she rides. Tom—Tom—it couldn't—that is, we couldn't have been premature, could we?"

"Prematoor? What in thunder you dreamin' about?"

"I don't know, Tom. For the life of me, I don't know. Only, that scow doesn't seem to me to ride right. I can't define the feeling I have, but I guess it's one of those things you're always getting. A hunch, partner! I have a hunch that we've been premature, and I'm going over to Dawson to see."

"Well, Eric, when you say you're goin', I know you're pig-headed enough to go. Thar's no use tryin' to stop you. But if you go, I go. The river's bin runnin' clear now for quite a while. The next whack, thar'll be a sumptuous floe fly down, and I don't wanta see you git caught alone. A man kin't do much alone. So I'll jist go along."

"All right then, Tom!" Sark shoved their own boat out through the shell-ice and put in the oars. "Jump aboard. I'll row, while you keep your eye focussed for ice."

THE ice was beginning to come down again, but, dodging three small floes in the crossing, the partners safely made the channel leading to the other shore. There they hung off a little in the dark, listening to the sounds of the scow docking ahead of them. They caught the grinding of its side against the iced planks of the wharf and saw Casino's silhouette in the halo of his lantern as he made fast.

Presently the lantern went out, and Sark and Bassett heard the three men stumping up the water-front and laughing hugely as they went. When they had passed out of hearing, the partners silently sculled their

Digitized by Google

boat up to the bow of the scow. Bassett held tight, and Sark breasted himself aboard and disappeared into the forward hold.

"Tom, come in here," Bassett heard him command in a cavernous tone.

Bassett flung his painter over the nose of the scow and followed his partner. He dropped through the forward hatch beside Sark who, with Casino's lantern lit and turned very low, was bending down gazing at something on the bottom of the hold.

"Look!" prompted Eric.

Bassett stared at a small heap of tame geese, fine, fat, white-fleshed, twelve-pound birds, plucked, singed and ready for the market.

"Five," he counted uncomprehendingly. "Must be left-overs, Eric. I guess we're in the wrong hold."

"You'll find five less in the other hold. See that bulkhead?"

Sark raised his lantern and the light showed a black hole sawed in the middle of what was supposed to be a solid partition.

"The poonitive pirate!" exploded Bassett, intuitively.

"No, the confounded strategist!" corrected his partner. "Five is just a nice number to run an endless chain. Ante threw them up one at a time to Casino. Casino dropped them down one at a time to Gunboat. And Gunboat shoved them through the bulkhead one at a time for Ante to throw again. I sure had a hard-shelled hunch, Tom, that this scow rode too high out of the water."

Eric blew out the lantern, and in solemn silence the two men climbed into their own boat, rowed back across the river and ascended the path to their cabin. Inside the cabin the silence still held. Bassett stoked the fire and sat down beside it. Sark pulled off his moccasins and outer clothing for bed. He slid into his bunk, but in the act of pulling the blanket over his shoulders he paused and looked inquiringly at Bassett.

"Of course Casino missed the channel on purpose and landed on our shore on purpose!" he expounded.

"On course!" nodded Tom.

"You don't happen to remember the exact wording of that receipt you gave him, do you?"

"Sure. It said: 'Received of Casino Charlie three thousand, five hundred dollars in payment for one thousand wild geese to be delivered in the mornin'.' Thar's no gittin' over that, Eric. We gotta deliver."

"Then do you know how much Casino's stuck us for? Have you figured what we lose? I have. Just sixteen thousand, five hundred dollars!"

"No, pardner, only sixteen thousand four hundred and twenty. You forgit the extry four geese we've kep' in the covered pen, the four Casino made us a present of the day you riddled his row-boat. Thar's eighty dollars on the credit side."

"Sure, I forgot that," admitted Eric. "You're right. Sixteen thousand four hundred and twenty dollars! But say, Tom, it isn't the money that's bothering me. What gets my goat is the fit Doc Martin and Solomon Sunday and the whole city of Dawson's having right now over Casino's tale of how he kept us freezing for two hours on the deck of his scow, counting five geese one hundred and ninety-nine times."

SARK pulled up the blanket and turned his face to the wall. Deep silence re-enveloped the cabin as Bassett smoked on and on, pondering on the eighty dollars on the credit side as represented by the four penned geese Casino had overlooked. For an hour he sat by the fire.

Then he arose with a sudden and amazing alacrity, looked to see if Sark were asleep and passed out and over to the slab bunk-house which constituted the Chilcats' quarters. There he held a brief conference with Tagish Jim. The result of the conference was that they both left the bunk-house with empty sacks under their arms.

They ascended the bench-ground above the river flat to the slough which through the machinations of Casino had caused them so much trouble a month or six weeks before. It was now frozen solid, and the two men kindled a big fire on the ice.

By the light of the fire they searched about among the stiff, crackling reeds and grasses, filling their sacks with bunches of a certain slough berry that Tagish Jim pointed out. When the sacks were full, they carried them down to the cabin, and they were thawing them in a pot on the stove when their operations disturbed Eric Sark.

It was midnight. Sark was only half-awake, and he regarded them with a somnambulistic stare.

"What you making?" he asked.

"Cranberry sass," smiled Bassett.

"What for?"

Digitized by Google

"For the geese, on course! What good is fowl 'thout cranberry sass?"

"Oh, another new stunt!" snickered Eric, rolling over face to the wall again. "Trying to minimize our losses, eh? Well, partner, I wish you luck. And call me in the morning in time to see you bottle it. You'll have to sell a lot of sauce to make up the sum of sixteen thousand, five hundred dollars."

"Sixteen thousand four hundred and twenty, I told you!"

"Sure, Tom, sure! I keep forgetting. But even that figure'll take a lot of sauce, partner, a luscious lot of sauce!"

Just for that thrust Bassett let him sleep in the morning.

Sark was a good sleeper anyway when nothing pressed, and being disturbed in the middle of the night left him lethargic at morning. When he pulled himself out of his bunk in the gray of the dawn, Casino's scow was already on the beach, and as he ran down, Bassett and Tagish Jim were preparing to hand the geese aboard.

"Here!" Sark yelled. "I didn't know you had them killed already. I'm in this. Why in thunder didn't you wake me?"

"I hated to," replied Bassett solicitously, "considerin' your delicate health and the sleep you lost last night."

"How much did you lose yourself?"

"All on it," Tom confessed.

"What doing?"

"Bottlin' that cranberry sass! But you're not too late yit to earn your breakfast. Dig in. Help Tagish Jim and the rest of the bucks pass 'em up. I'll help stow."

Bassett leaped upon the scow and went to snatch off a hatch, but Casino, knowing that his holds and especially the central bulkhead would not bear inspection, hastily prevented him.

"Wait!" he shouted. "There's no use packin' them below and takin' them out again for all the distance we got to go. Lay them in rows on the deck. They'll be better there. They won't crush. For they'll be soft. You haven't frozen them yet, have you, Tom?"

"Froze? No!" answered Bassett, dropping back ashore. "It ain't five minnits since Tagish Jim and me fixed the last of 'em up for you. You was early, Casino. The geese is warm. Feel that one!"

"Sure warm," commented Casino, "and fresh as if they'd just stepped aboard out of the pen. You see for yourself, Tom, you couldn't put warm, soft geese like that in the hold. But they'll lie fine on deck, and that reminds me that I brought you five of the frozen tame ones. As I said last night, you fellows always was fair fighters with a nice sense of humor, and I want to make you a present of them five for your Christmas dinner. Here, catch!"

"Thanks," returned Bassett, catching the armful and laying it thoughtfully down. "Thanks, Casino. That's mighty considerate of you."

"Don't mention it," begged Casino. He grandly waved off additional thanks and plunged into the work of loading.

"Shove them along, boys," he exhorted. "Shove as fast as you can. We got to take the river crossing while she's open."

ACCORDINGLY the geese were swiftly loaded upon the deck of the scow, and the craft swung out into the stream under the impulse of the three sweeps worked by Casino, Ante and Gunboat.

"We'll jist go along, Eric, and see that they git acrost all right," Bassett suggested.

He launched the rowboat, motioned Sark and Tagish Jim into it and pulled after the scow. A little floe-ice was running, but it was not very formidable, so Casino boldly rammed a straight course through it. The cakes careened from the strong, blunt nose of the scow and bobbed to either side. Casino's craft cleared a lane as it progressed, and in its open wake the rowboat followed.

"You see she's got the weight this time, Tom," Sark observed. "He didn't cross like that last night. He's got one thousand fowl weighing ten pounds each on now, and that sure gives him some tonnage."

"Sure does," nodded Bassett, "and don't them five ton of fowl make a great sight, Eric, lyin' like that? Look at 'em, ten hundred big, sleek-plumaged birds. Tagish and me was careful with 'em. You don't see a streak of blood or a rumpled feather. Notice the markin's on their heads and necks? Black as velvet bands! A colossal sight, I say."

"There's another colossal sight," remarked Sark, pointing.

They were approaching the mouth of the channel which led in to the Dawson wharf, and Eric was indicating the shore where a

Digitized by Google

vast crowd was lined up, watching the boats come in.

"It's all over the city, Tom. I see Doc Martin and Solomon Sunday in front with grins as wide as a door. Everybody knows Casino's stuck us for sixteen thousand, four hundred and twenty dollars."

"It's only sixteen thousand, four hundred now," Tom declared.

"How do you make that out?" asked Eric.

"We're a goose to the good. He give us five, and we give him back four."

"You didn't go and shove aboard those extra four?"

"Sure. Didn't he make us a present? I couldn't fall behind him in the generosity stunt, could I?"

"Well, when it comes down to generosity, I guess not. But partner, if we could only eat those five as often as we counted them, we wouldn't have to buy any bacon for a couple of years. Those five form the crux of the whole affair."

"Nope, the overlooked four do."

"I think it's them five, and the crowd on shore seems to think so, too. That's what they're yelling about now. Listen!"

"One hundred and ninety-nine; one hundred and ninety-nine!" many score voices chanted from the wharf edges. "One hundred and ninety-nine—times five—make nine hundred and ninety-five!"

A raucous roar of laughter followed the chant, and Casino turned and grinned back over his shoulder as he plied the stern sweep on the scow ahead.

"Some hefty joke ashore!" he remarked. "Wonder what they're laughin' at!"

"Laugh! Let 'em laugh!" snarled Bassett. "They'll laugh a thunderin' lot more in a minnit."

TOM had his eyes upon a large ice-floe, drifting down the middle of the Klondike River, and just as it enveloped the scow outside the channel-mouth and forced Casino, Ante and Gunboat to put all their attention and strength upon the sweeps, he jumped up with a Colt revolver in his hand.

"Here, what you going to do?" demanded Sark. "Watch your oars. The ice'll upset the boat."

But into Bassett's seat, as Bassett stood up, slid Tagish Jim.

"Me row," he grunted with an alacrity that showed Tom's move had been prearranged. "Me watch um ice. Shoot, Tom, shoot! Um begin to kick!"

Bassett's hand went up, his Colt banged, and at its bang the four seemingly dead geese which had been used once before by Casino himself in an attempt to stampede the host, leaped to life on the deck of the scow and launched into the air!

Before Casino's astounded eyes the frightened birds bored skyward, and after them, the roar of their wings punctuated by the banging of Bassett's Colt, streamed the one thousand he had bought.

They whizzed this way and that in their frantic burst for freedom, brushing their wings against Casino's face, yet not he nor Ante Baker nor Gunboat Kane dared lift hands from the sweeps to stop them. The ice was all about, and they had to row or swamp. All they could do as regarded the geese was to breathe them sulphurous farewell.

"By the gods of the Hoonahs!" exclaimed Sark, while, astounded as Casino, he watched twenty thousand dollars' worth of fowl blackening Dawson's skyline. "What in the unruly universe did you do to those birds, Tom?"

"Fed 'em cranberry sass," Bassett chuckled. "Only it wasn't cranberries. It was some other kind of berries. I dunno what kind. Neither does Tagish Jim, but he calls 'em sleepin' berries."

"Sure um sleeping berries," grunted Tagish, grinning like the image on a totem-pole as he plied the oars. "Didn't um sleep?"

"They certainly did, Tagish! You see, it was the Chilcat's ruse, Eric. I was plumb bushed to find a way to beat Casino till I went to Tagish Jim. But he fixed things up. He told me how he'd see geese laid out for a few minnits from eatin' them berries on the Old Crow River. Not pizen, you savvy, nor even any harm, but thar's some consarned opiate in the berries as sends 'em into a short and silly snooze. It don't last long, so I was ready with a foosillade when they began to stir. You've seen how the game worked."

"Yes, by thunder, I have, and if Casino should ever die, Tom, I'm going to raise him a monument a hundred feet high on top of the Dome and engrave it with the epitaph: THE GOOSE GAMBLER'S GOLDEN GRAVE. Look at his empty deck! He hasn't a feather left!"

Digitized by Google

THE scow had gained the channel, safe from the menace of the ice, and under the tumult of laughter and jibe from the Dawson wharf turned suddenly back upon himself, Casino slammed his sweep aside and whirled enraged upon those in the boat behind.

"Don't git riled, Casino," bantered Bassett. "Dawson Christmas dinners do look mighty slim, but you needn't worry about that. You come over on Christmas Day and eat with Eric, Tagish and me. We have five nice birds left, you know."

"Eat? Eat dinner with you?" choked Casino. "I'll see you cindered and cremated first." He pulled the partners' receipt from his pocket and shook it wrathfully in their faces over the stern of the scow.

"I'll sue you," he bellowed. "That's what I'll do. This receipt's as good as a contract. It's for one thousand dead geese to be delivered by you. I've got it in black and white, and I'll sue you till you can't stand, sit or sneeze!"

"Oh! You will, will you?" guffawed Bassett. "Your eyesight's bad. You better read that receipt agin. It don't say dead geese. It don't say geese dead or alive, or, for that matter awake or asleep. It says wild geese, if you examine it close, one thousand *wild* geese to be delivered by us. We delivered 'em, didn't we? And they was wild, wasn't they? Fact is, I never seen wild geese any wilder. Jist look whar the beggars is now!"

Bassett pointed southward with his emptied Colt.

There, far down over Bonanza Valley, a huge, black wedge was splitting the air. They were bound for the sunland, speeding seventy miles an hour, and as they sped, they clanged out the sonorous flight-call to all other laggards in the Northland.

THE COWARD

By W. Townend

Author of "A-Roving," "Private Harris," "Irish," "Oil at San Nicolas," etc.

AS THE years creep by, slowly and remorselessly, the past with its sorrows and joys and unlearned lessons becomes something almost unreal, a phantasy that could never have been true. One sees oneself as some stranger dimly remembered, playing a part, one of a crowd of actors, the most important of all, yet at times satisfied to be a super, forced to one side while others luckier or more deserving hold the center of the stage.

Spellbound one sits and watches, smiling perhaps, but sadly of course, for it is a play that must bring a lump to the throat and a mist to the eyes. And in this play there will be among the throng swaggering behind the footlights one who stands out more prominently than all the others, the leading actor—the star.

And it is in this way that I myself in my own private playhouse, which is called memory, await with eagerness the raising of the curtain and the coming of a man with a brown, square-jawed face, clean-shaven when shaven at all, with gray, far-sighted eyes, a broken tooth that shows a gap at each smile, and deep lines from the nostrils to the corners of his mouth.

Digitized by Google

He wears none of the traditional garments of the stage such as the star should wear, but more often than not, old clothes stained with oil and grease, a shirt of flannel or dungaree, loose trousers supported by a leather belt, unpolished shoes, a sweat-rag knotted around his neck, and a peaked cap perched at the back of his head.

The setting of the scene will be in keeping: perhaps an engine-room with the cranks whirling 'round and 'round in the light of flickering slush lamps; or a small cabin with two ports, a bunk and chest of drawers, a shelf filled with books, the walls covered with pictures, and the water leaking through from the deck above to the floor beneath; or maybe, and most likely, the after-deck, with the sun beating down on the white bulkheads, the boats and ventilators, the funnel with its yellow band, and the No. 3 hatch on which I myself am seated by the side of the brown-faced man with the square jaw and the broken tooth.

Thus, after more years than seems possible, do I now see Mr. Harrington, the second engineer of the *Umballa*, a tramp steamer on which for reasons of my own I once took passage to the Mediterranean and Black Sea and home again.

It was on this voyage that he told me the story of his life, not as one connected whole, with a beginning and an end, but in snatches, bit by bit, intermingled with fragments from the lives of others, men and women he had known and mixed with in the four quarters of the world.

As he himself once said, he could not forget. Without effort he could recall scraps of conversation spoken years before, small characteristics of face or manner, places where he had been when things happened, ships he had sailed in; the smallest details were graven in the tablets of his mind to be referred to at will. And to talk, to have a listener, was to Mr. Harrington, the one way of escape from the burden of his thoughts. He craved companionship like some small child; solitude, the long wakeful hours in his own room, between watch and watch, brought to him the blackness of despair, the gnawing agony of remorse, regrets for the might-have-been. The ghosts of the past were with him always, more real than flesh and blood.

He drank, of course, heavily and persistently, but only in a mad endeavor to forget; he used his fists when it were necessary, kindness being out of place, so he averred, when dealing with dissatisfied trimmers or firemen. He spoke with contempt of things that most men hold sacred. He could laugh at his own troubles and himself, a second engineer on a tramp steamer with a bad record behind him and no future.

And yet not until I had known him for some time—and nowhere else do you know a man so quickly as on a voyage at sea—did I discover that his outward cynicism, his mocking, ready laugh, was but a cloak to hide his inner feelings. Sentiment he professed to despise, yet no man was more eager or willing to help those in trouble.

Of the many tales that I had from Mr. Harrington there were few that did not give me some curious glimpse into his own life. But he seldom set out to talk wholly of himself; it was usually the mention of some name or some out-of-the-way seaport or some steamer, that started him off on a train of thought whence he would drift by slow degrees into a story.

Perhaps the chief charm of these stories was their amazing charity. Mr. Harrington never blamed. Unlike so many people whose lives are held up as patterns of piety and virtue, he understood the limitations of human nature. Others might be overwhelmed by temptations of which he himself knew nothing. Why, then, being ignorant of circumstances, pass judgment? There was only one unforgivable sin to Mr. Harrington, and that, cowardice. The coward was beyond all hope, an outcast, impossible from any standpoint.

All of which brings me to a story he told me in the engineers' mess-room on the *Umballa* one hot night after he had come off watch and was in no mood for sleep.

For some minutes neither of us, remember, had spoken, and at last Mr. Harrington turned with a smile and a curious light in his eyes that hinted at what would follow.

"You rec'lect what the chief said this forenoon about every good thing that a man does bein' mostly due to a woman, don't you?"

I nodded.

"What about it?"

"I'm not sayin' it's not true in some cases; in most cases, maybe. But now an' again it's the other way 'round. I've an instance in mind now, which just come to me. An', listen, son, there was no fault to be found

Digitized by Google

with the girl—not till after it all happened, anyhow. It was her bein' what she was, though, pretty an' lovin' an' sick at heart at havin' him leave her to go to sea, that ruined a pal of mine—broke his heart an' killed him. A riddle, eh? Yes, it is—a riddle without an answer.

HAVE I ever spoken about Sandy Morgan, mate on the *Maid of Orleans* soon after I went as second engineer? Welsh, of course, from Swansea, and as good a man as you'd want to meet, till he met an' picked up with Annie Fairfax. After that he was fit for nothin' except the scrap-heap an' a job ashore. For her sake, an' for no other reason, he wouldn't do what he ought to have done. When she heard of it, she wouldn't look at him.

He was in trouble, as deep as a man wants to be, and the girl that he loved wouldn't stand by his side to help him. Did that bring sense to Sandy? It did not. Annie could do no wrong, not if she tried. Which was —— foolish, of course, an' showed that he knew less than nothin' about women.

How did it all come about? Oh, the usual way. She met Sandy somewhere or other, saw that he liked her, an' beckoned. Sandy was lost from then on. He hadn't a dog's chance once she made up her mind that she'd have him.

Annie Fairfax was the kind of girl that a man turns an' looks after when he passes her in the street: well-built, straight-backed, not very tall, but not what you'd call short, with an easy swing when she walked an' her chin mostly a trifle tilted. She'd fair hair an' round, pink cheeks an' blue eyes an' a mouth that was always laughin'. There wasn't much else about her worth mentionin', save that she liked bein' admired an' was hard-up.

That's where the trouble came in. She was poor, earnin' next to nothin' in some office, an' just mad to get clear of the drudgery into a home of her own, with money to spend as she wished.

At first you'd have asked what she could see in Sandy. He wasn't the kind of man that you'd choose as bein' anyway out of the ord'nary, until after you got to know him. Then you understood a little more what he was. He kept too much to himself to make many friends. It would have been better for him if he hadn't. But the friends that he had were real friends who believed in him.

An' then—an' whether she loved him or not this must have weighed with Annie—he had prospects. It wouldn't be over long before he was made captain an' given a ship of his own; he'd a pull, of course, bein' a nephew of old man McGuinness, one of the owners. That's not sayin' he didn't deserve his luck—he did, an' there wasn't a soul to say that he didn't.

Speakin' the truth, I hadn't noticed anything out of the common till one mornin' a few days before we were due to leave port Sandy comes into my room.

"Harrington," he says, "I'm the luckiest man in the world. I'm goin' to marry Annie Fairfax."

I said I was glad an' I hoped they'd be happy, an' not havin' been that way myself at that time I was rather amused. Poor old Sandy! From the way he went on you'd have thought no one had been in love with a girl before him.

They'd be married as quick as they could; but at the very quickest, that wouldn't be till after the end of the next voyage. If I was asked to describe Sandy in those days I'd have said he was happy, but worried almost to death. Says he:

"I can't stand the idea of that girl havin' to work for another three or four months on starvation wages, slavin' away from mornin' to night to keep body an' soul together. It isn't livin'," he says, "it's just bein' able to keep from dyin'.

"I'd marry her now, if there was time," says he, "but she won't hear of it. She's like all women. She wants clothes an' a chance to prepare things. But," he says, "life won't be so blamed hard for her as it's been up to now, anyway."

"Why's that?" says I, an' he looks embarrassed an' awkward.

"Well," he says, "if a man can't help out the girl that he's goin' to marry, who can he help?"

So he didn't need to say any more.

An' the girl! It wasn't easy to say. Either she was simple, purposely simple, or else she was deep—too deep for a man to fathom. She was fond of Sandy, after a fashion — she must have been — but she wasn't as gone as he was. I was with them one day when he put his arm through hers, an' she drew away quick.

"You know I don't like bein' pawed over

Digitized by Google

in public," she says. "Don't do it, please."

"I'm sorry," says Sandy. "I didn't mean it, Annie; I didn't, really."

Humble he was—very.

The last night on shore Sammy Hutton, the third engineer, an' myself went into a place for a bite to eat. An' there in a corner were Annie Fairfax an' Sandy Morgan; she very straight an' composed an' dignified, like she knew every man in the room was watchin' her, an' Sandy, pale an' quiet an' wretched, as if life wasn't worth livin' without her.

"Poor Sandy!" says Sammy Hutton.

"Why poor?" I says.

"She knows which side her bread's got the butter on," says Sammy. "She'll have him because he can give her just what she's lookin' for: a home, nice clothes, freedom, an' no further need to work for a livin'. I know her sort," he says, "an' I know that she'd marry any one, so long as he'd money enough."

"Aren't you a bit down on the girl?" I says.

Sammy laughs:

"Not a bit of it. He'll find out I'm right, too."

"He'll be very good to her, anyway," I says.

"That's just it," says Sammy, "but will she be as good to him? She's got a high standard of what bein' good means, an' I'd be sorry for Sandy Morgan if he didn't reach up to it."

That night, late, Sandy comes into my berth just as I was about ready for bed.

"Well," says he, "tomorrer we sail."

"Worse luck!" says I.

"Yes," says he, "worse luck! An' I'm leavin' behind me the only girl that I ever cared for. The finest girl in the world. Harrington," he says, "she cried when I said good-by, an' I felt like I'd never see her again."

I didn't have much sympathy then, son, but later, a year or so later, I understood what Sandy Morgan had suffered an' what it meant to have to go through a long, long weary voyage with your heart at home with all that you hold dear—an' only a letter at each port.

An' then, still in my room, leanin' against the wall, he goes on.

"Harrington," he says, "I don't know what would become of that poor child but for me. I'm all that she had, everything. An' away at the back of my head there's a fear that something will happen to keep us apart."

"It's awful late, Sandy," says I. "Aren't you goin' to turn in tonight? An' besides, you've been at sea long enough now to know that it's no use frettin' over what can't be prevented. Also," says I, "it don't do no good."

"No good at all!" he says, noddin' his head, "but I have to—I can't help it. You know yourself, the things that a man meets with at sea. Harrington," he says. "I'm frightened."

An' he shivered like he was cold, though the month was July an' hot.

"If I was married," he says, "I shouldn't care. But it's bein' not married that worries me; that an' knowin' she's no one to care for her, but myself—no relations, an' her father an' mother dead. As soon as I get back—' he says, an' there I stopped him.

"Sandy," I says, openin' the door of my room, "the best place for you is in bed. You're tired an' talkin' rot. I'm half dead with sleep, myself," an' with that I bundled him out into the alleyway an' climbed into my bunk.

Weeks afterward the conversation we'd had that night came back to me, every word, an' I understood what had been workin' in Sandy's mind an' drivin' him half crazy with fear.

THE voyage wasn't anything special, one way or the other. The food was no worse an' the crew no better than usual, an' for a wonder there was no trouble in the fo'c's'le, or unpleasantness between the bridge an' the engine-room.

Prob'ly we'd have had nothin' to talk of at all but for the change in Sandy Morgan. He'd altered all for the worse—run to seed, sort of. Before this partic'lar voyage he'd always been cheerful, at least, with a smile on his face whenever you saw him. But now—well, he moped like a sick hen. In port all that he wanted to do was to sit in his room an' read over the letters he'd had from home. An' at sea if he did take it into his head to come down to the engine-room for a chat I'd have paid him to keep away.

For however much I might like him—an' I did like him—I'd no wish to be forced to sit with my lips shut an' listen to full an' glowin' descriptions of the girl that was waitin' for him in Cardiff. I was more sick

Digitized by Google

an' tired of that girl, Annie Fairfax, than any ten girls put together I'd ever met. An' I almost hoped that I'd never meet her again. It's queer what a prejudice a man can have just on account of some one else bein' praised in his hearin', isn't it?

Anyhow, the voyage dragged on in the same old way till we were homeward bound from Philadelphia to London. We left the first week in October in fine weather, but a week later we ran into a breeze that gave us all the fun an' excitement we wanted for four solid days—high seas, head winds an' heavy squalls one on top of another.

By the fifth day, however, the wind had dropped, an' though we were rollin' as bad as ever, worse maybe, the sea was calm compared to what it had been two days before. 'Long about three bells in the afternoon when I was in my bunk, I heard a commotion, feet overhead, an' voices an' the chief engineer askin' next door what the blazes was happenin'. I slipped out of my blankets an' ran up on deck, an' there on our port bow was a schooner with the red ensign flyin', union down, from the stump of the foremast which was all that was left standin'.

"Hullo!" says I. "What's all this?"

"Nothin'," says Sammy Hutton, "nothin' much. But it's lucky it wasn't yesterday isn't it?"

An' he went back to the engine-room, it bein' his watch, twelve to four.

Now, remember, son, an' keep it in mind, the sea was nothin' compared to what we'd been havin'—nasty, of course, that goes without sayin', heavy an' slow an' big, but nothin' but what with ord'nary skill an' common sense one of our life-boats couldn't be launched. An' we had to get the crew of that schooner off—we just had to. There wasn't a man aboard of the *Maid of Orleans* who didn't know that, the minute he seen her.

It was Sandy Morgan's watch below an' he came slowly along the after-deck, buttonin' on his coat, just havin' been woken.

"Sandy," says I, smilin' to think of the sleep that he hadn't had. "Sandy, this means a trip for you, my lad, doesn't it?"

He don't answer, just passed me like a man in a dream, his face white an' his teeth pressed into his lower lip. An' before I could reason it out, the old man turned an' saw him.

"Mr. Morgan," he says, "you'd better get the cover off that port life-boat an' swing her out. Look alive, now, we've none too much time!"

An' what did Sandy say? The last thing in the world I'd expected.

"Pretty bad sea, isn't it, sir, for launchin' a boat?" he says.

A bad sea! I looked at him where he stood with one foot on the lowest step of the bridge ladder gazin' up at the old man. An' what in the name of all that was wicked had he meant by that?

"A bad sea!" says the old man, kind of surprised but otherwise not put out.

"Why, yes, it is a bad sea, I suppose. But the hands aren't expectin' a mill-pond in Mid-Atlantic. They'll go with you all right, Mr. Morgan, or I'll know the reason. Make haste now," he says.

"It's not as bad as it was when we picked up that fireman two voyages ago, is it?"

An' Sandy makes a chokin' noise in his throat an' turns away, for it was he himself who'd gone over the side the winter before in the Straits of Dover to save the life of a fireman who was drunk an' anxious to die. It was near dark too, an' startin' to blow. That's what made all that came next so incomprehensible an' hard to believe.

"Bos'un!" says Sandy over his shoulder, an' there followed the usual tuggin' an' heavin' to get the canvas cover off the life boat an' swing the davits outward.

We were near enough now to make out the figures of men huddled together on the poop an' the old man rings to stop. An' then some one sings out—

"What's this comin'?"

An' we seen another steamer, smaller than us even, approachin', an' we knew that she also had sighted the schooner an' would stand by till we'd rescued the crew.

"Are you ready there?" says the old man.

"Perhaps, sir, they're goin' to go after them," says Sandy, pausin' with one leg over the gunwale, holdin' on to the davit to steady himself.

"Are they?" he says.

I was quite close to him an' I heard every word as plain as I hear the cranks down below now, an' I saw the look on his face, the lines an' the worry, as clear as I see that bucket yonder under the shelf.

"What in thunder has that got to do with me?" says the skipper, gettin' purple about the neck. "Look alive, an' lower away

Digitized by Google

that boat! What's come to you arguin' there like a lawyer?"

Four of the hands an' Sandy were in the life-boat when it struck the water, stern first. An' it was more by the mercy of Heaven than through any judgment of their own that they got clear away from the *Maid of Orleans* without upsettin'.

"Give way, boys," says the old man, "an' for God's sake, hurry!"

Then we leaned over the rails an' watched our boat, a tiny little bit of a thing in the midst of those big hills an' hollows of pale green water, makin' for the sinkin' schooner.

UNLESS you've actually been out in a small boat in the middle of the Atlantic when there's a heavy sea on, it's no use tryin' to understand just what it's like. You feel so everlastin' helpless an' lost an' lonesome.

But Plug Fergusson took *us* out in half a gale—Sandy Morgan only had to put up with a heavy swell after a big blow. Bad enough, God knows, an' dangerous too, but nothin' worse than you're supposed to be ready to face when you're asked to. An' all in a lifetime, anyway.

They'd make it, of course, we hadn't the least doubt about that. There was no danger in the pullin' between the two vessels. Once they got clear of us they were safe till they were alongside the schooner. Then would come the only hard part—the takin' off of the crew—an' even that Sandy would manage without much trouble, we knew, or he ought to have done!

He didn't, all the same, an' why? Because he never reached the schooner. No, son, an' he wasn't upset, neither, nor drowned—nothin' like it. He just came back to the *Maid of Orleans*. Yes, son, it's gospel truth. As sure as I'm sittin' here, Sandy Morgan turned back.

The other steamer was close up by this time an' the second mate with the glasses glued to his eyes said she was German an' not much of a one at that.

"German, eh!" says the old man. "Well, what are they stickin' around here for? We're doin' all that's wanted; they might as well clear off an' leave us."

All of a sudden I heard the chief say under his breath—

"What in Heaven's name is he doin' now?"

An' the old man begins to swear. What was the reason? Why, there was the boat which had been more than half way to the schooner—half—three-quarters of the way, I mean—turnin'.

"What in——!" says the old man. "What's he doin'?"

"Headin' this way!" says the second mate very deliberate.

"Why?" says the old man. "Why? Why?" Ragin' with anger he was. "Is he afraid?" he says. "Is that what it is? Don't tell me he's frightened!"

We didn't say anything, the rest of us; we just waited, lookin' at the boat risin' an' fallin' on the water, an' the white foam on the crest of the waves, an' the sinkin' schooner with the red ensign, union down, on the broken mast. An' then the second mate lets out a yell—

"Look!" says he. "Look! That Dutchman's lowerin' a boat!"

The old man's face went about twenty years older. Us—to be shamed that way in front of a ship flyin' another flag, an' the German flag at that! For that's what was happenin'.

The Germans had lowered a boat when they seen that out chaps had given up tryin', an' we, a British ship, were forced to watch them doin' the work what we should have done. It was ours by right, by every right in the world, if only by virtue of the fact, as the third engineer observed that very night, that we claimed the right to rule the waves an' had done for quite a while. What's more the schooner was British, too.

"Shall we lower another boat, sir?" says the second mate.

"No!" snaps the old man, "we will not. I won't run the risk of losin' any more of my crew, for by the manner Mr. Morgan is steerin' that life-boat he'll never reach his deck. Let the Germans do it," he says. "Let them have the pride of doin' what we can't."

When the life-boat came alongside with Sandy Morgan an' his crew of four—an' by now the German boat was well on its way to the schooner—the old man leans far out over the side of the bridge.

"Mr. Morgan," he says very slowly an' clearly, "you're a bloody coward! Come aboard an' make haste about it, you cur!"

The life-boat was hoisted up on to the davits an' the hands dropped down on the deck, lookin' frightened an' angry, like men who'd done what they knew wasn't right.

An' of course they were told about it.

Digitized by Google

"You're a blasted fine lot," says one of the firemen who was half way out of the fiddley. "Why didn't yer do what yer set out to do?"

"You shut your mouth, or I'll make you," says a sailor. "Was it our fault? *He* made us turn—said it was too risky."

An' the fireman laughs as much as to say that he didn't believe a word he was sayin'. That was in front of Sandy, too.

The old man telegraphs full speed ahead an' then comes down the bridge ladder.

"Get for'ard," he says to the hands, an' he goes straight up to where Sandy was standing all by himself an' looks him full in the face.

"Man an' boy," he says, "I have been at sea these forty years, an' this," says he, "is the first time I've seen anything like it!"

Sandy wasn't ashamed partic'larly, not by the looks of him, nor by what he said, neither.

"I did what I thought proper," he says. "I didn't dare risk the lives of the boat's crew to no purpose. We were in danger of swampin'."

The old man gives a little groan.

"For God's sake!" he says. "Do you mean it, man? Do you mean it?" Then he turns an' points. "Look yonder, an' see. If them Germans can reach that schooner, why couldn't you? They aren't afraid, are they? You were. There's no argument needed. You're a coward."

With that he walked off to the chart-room. He was right, of course. The boat from the German steamer had reached the schooner already an' was beginnin' to take off the crew. We could see them.

THAT night about half-past seven or so, Sandy comes down into the engine-room.

"Harrington," says he, an' he stood by the ladder with his face gray an' worn out.

"Well," says I.

"I couldn't help it," he says, after a time. "I couldn't Harrington. I just couldn't."

"You ought to have done what you were told," I says. "Why did you turn back, Sandy? What made you?"

For I knew that whatever he might be, an' whatever the rest might be sayin' about him, Sandy Morgan was no coward.

"We'd have been swamped if we'd gone on," he says.

"Swamped!" says I. "Sandy," I says, "that won't do. Why weren't the Germans swamped? We saw them alongside, didn't we? *They* risked it. Why couldn't you?"

An' then he gives a sob, deep down in his throat.

"My God!" says he. "I was scared."

"I nodded without speakin'.

"I might have been drowned," says he. "What if I hadn't come back from the ship, eh?"

"Well," says I, "what of it? There've been better men than you, Sandy Morgan, drowned through doin' what they were told. Why not you? Is drownin' too good a death for the likes of us?"

"Man," he says, "man, have you forgotten Annie?" An' he stares at me kind of horrified. "Have you forgotten Annie waitin' for me at home in Cardiff? What would she do if I didn't come back to her? Starve, maybe, or drag on in that office for years! I've her to think of now, Harrington," he says, "as well as myself."

Then I began to see what he was drivin' at an' I felt sorry. It wasn't himself he was afraid for, but the girl; it was her that had made a good man into a coward. Poor Sandy! He was speakin' the truth, I knew. Would he have turned back before he had fallen in love with Annie Fairfax? Not for a million pounds! No more than Plug Fergusson would have done that time we took off the crew of the *Muriel Stevens*.

"Sandy," says I, "I'm sorry. I understand," I says, "but, man, will the others believe it?"

"What if they don't?" says he.

"They'll call you a coward," I says.

"Let them!" he says very short. "Let them. It's little I care what they think."

"Sandy," I says, "didn't you know that you might just as well have gone on an' taken the men off the schooner? There was no more danger in that, than in turnin' an' pullin' back to the *Maid of Orleans*."

An' for the first time I think he knew what he'd really done—that he'd disgraced himself an' his ship. He looked at me kind of dazed.

"I had to," he says. "I might have been drowned." An' then very slowly he climbed the ladder.

After that he kept pretty much to himself, not speakin' at all hardly, an' not spoken to. The old man never so much as noticed him. The second mate told me he'd pass him like he didn't exist. An' Sandy

Digitized by Google

would just go red an' hold up his head an' say nothin'.

That was what none of the others could make out. An' at last when I told them about Annie Fairfax an' the reason he'd turned back they wouldn't believe me. It was no more than an excuse, so they said, the first that came handy, an' feeble at that.

An' the queerest part of the whole business was that Sandy had shown time an' again that he was as good a man as you'd find an' as ready to risk his life as the next. That made the whole thing so absurd. Lord knows I've no use for a coward, but I understood what was wrong with Sandy Morgan an' the others didn't.

"Will he stay with the ship?" says Sammy Hutton one dinner time.

"Why not?" says the chief. "Why not? He's done nothin' against the owners, has he? He's due for a ship of his own in a voyage or two, an' old man McGuinness would rather get shot of the whole crowd of us than Sandy Morgan.

"You'll see," says the chief, "he'll not leave the ship. He's stubborn, is Sandy. He'll brazen it out to the bitter end, you'll see if he won't."

The chief was right. Even after what followed, Sandy stayed on the *Maid of Orleans*.

WE REACHED the Thames in about two weeks or so after we'd abandoned the schooner, a damp, muggy, rainy mornin' in October. An' we learned then what none of us ever suspected: that a full account of what had occurred had been printed in New York with copious comments, an' telegraphed on to London.

Consequence of that was, when the pilot come aboard he brought us a bundle of papers in which we could read what the skipper an' crew of the schooner, an' also the German steamer, thought of the way the boat from the *Maid of Orleans* had given up an' turned back.

The best of it was, of course, none of the London newspapers believed such a thing possible. It hadn't happened, that's all.

The German boat had taken the crew of the schooner off, an' seein' that they were safe, the British steamer had gone on. But it wasn't exactly pleasant readin' for us, was it? What saved us, though, was that the papers weren't interested; there was too much excitement in other parts of the world for them to bother about what a miserable tramp steamer had done or hadn't. Besides, all this had happened two whole weeks before, an' two weeks is the blazes of a long time these days, anyway.

There was one newspaper man come aboard soon after we were alongside an' asked if there'd been anything happenin' while we was crossin'.

"No," says we, "nothin'."

An' then his highness remembered.

"Oh, weren't you the steamer that didn't take the crew off that schooner but let the Germans put out a boat instead?"

"Where did you get that yarn from?" says the old man.

He glared at the young reporter like he wanted to choke him. An' angry! From plague, battle, murder an' sudden death, deliver us! Angry was no name for it. He stuck out his chin at him.

"How did that —— lie get into print in the first place?" he says. "We didn't abandon anything. Our life-boat was launched, I daresay, but the Germans had launched theirs first, havin' arrived before we did. Our fellers didn't turn back till they saw the crew of the schooner rescued. That's the whole story," says the old man, "an' if ever I meet the Dutchman who spread that lie about us there'll be trouble."

An' so on, with the rest of us chimin' in with full details, all except Sandy, who didn't seem to bother his head much about what we were talkin' about.

But this was the real worry: the newspapers in London mightn't concern themselves about anything so uninterestin' as a tramp steamer, but on the Tyne an' in Liverpool an' the Bristol Channel ports it 'u'd be diff'rent. They'd want full information about what we'd been doin', an' they'd see that they got it. We'd lie, of course. What's more we'd stick to it, thus makin' a virtue of a necessity.

There were letters waitin' as usual when we arrived. An' no one had more than Sandy Morgan. But—an' this was the queer part—the one that he wanted was missin'. I knew that from the way he looked when he seen the envelopes.

She'd not written! An' why not? That was puzzlin', wasn't it? She had at each other port, as I knew to my cost, Sandy havin' driven me half crazy by readin' me bits of her letters; but not here. He spoke about it that first night when we were havin' a pipe before goin' ashore.

Digitized by Google

"I shouldn't fret," says I. "You'll hear in the mornin', you're bound to." Thus by raisin' hopes for the future takin' his mind off the present.

"Do you think so?" he says. "I suppose I shall. She'll have waited till she read in the papers we'd been reported."

That comforted him considerable—he'd need of comfort, too, both then an' later. Poor devil! he suffered all right. Matter of fact he never heard from Annie Fairfax at all, not the whole time we were in the Thames. He'd written an' he'd wired, reply paid, too, but not a word in return did he get.

"Why is it?" he says like a kid askin' questions it don't understand. "Why is it? What have I done?"

An' then, another time:

"Lord only knows how I've suffered! I've done enough for her sake without havin' this to endure as well."

Very patient he was, yet frightened. An' the night before we reached Cardiff we met on the after deck.

"We'll be in by tomorrer evenin'," he says, "an' I'll know then what's happened."

He knew all right, did Sandy! He knew.

"Comin' ashore?" he says, as soon as we were through in the engine-room an' had washed up an' dressed. "We may as well walk up Bute Street together, hadn't we?"

Which we did, him an' me an' Sammy Hutton. That was how it was that Sammy an' me heard what Annie Fairfax said to Sandy Morgan.

IT WAS growin' dark, I remember, an' we were standin' at a corner talkin' together, when all of a sudden Sandy Morgan catches his breath.

"It's Annie," he says. An' it was.

The girl stops, lookin' sort of bewildered an' dazed.

"Annie," says Sandy, an' he holds out his hand.

She doesn't see it, not apparently. The color seemed to creep out of his face.

"Annie," he says, "aren't you glad that I'm home?"

"No," she says, "I'm not!"

An' she just stared at him, up an' down, very slow an' deliberate.

I dunno' why, but even the best of women can be cruel when it suits them. An' I'm not so sure that it isn't the best way, after all. Beatin' around the bush don't help in the long run. It makes things harder to bear. The sudden shock hurts, perhaps, but you know the worst without any false hopes bein' raised.

We didn't go, Sammy an' me. We just stood where we were an' looked at the pair of 'em, an' waited for something to happen.

"Annie," says Sandy, kind of stupid, "what is it? What's wrong?"

"Nothin' much," she says coldly, "only that you're the man who was afraid to rescue the crew of a sinkin' ship. They're talkin' about you all over town. You turned back an' let the Germans do what you didn't dare."

It was then that Sammy took a hand, plunged in so to speak, flat-footed.

"That's not true, Miss Fairfax," he says, "is it?" says he, turnin' to me.

"No!" says I. "Not a bit." An' she smiled like she knew we were tellin' lies.

She looks at Sandy Morgan up an' down again, very contemptuous.

"Did you turn back from that schooner same as they say you did, or didn't you?" she says. "Speak the truth now," she says, "if you can."

"Yes," says he chokin', "I did, but——"

She laughs.

"So I heard," she says. "You were afraid, weren't you?"

Sandy Morgan shivers like sentence of death had been passed.

"Afraid!" says he. "Why, yes, in a way!" he says. "But, Annie, girl, listen."

Lord! He might just as well have been speakin' to the ballast pump stop-valve, down in the engine-room. It 'ud have shown as much interest as Annie did.

"I don't want to hear any more!" she says. "I'll marry no man who's a coward. You've shamed yourself an' you've shamed me—an' that's all about it."

An' she made off, with her cheeks burnin' an' her head in the air, as good-lookin' an' as cruel an' hard-hearted a girl as you'd find if you searched from Cardiff to London for a year an' a half. We watched her, the three of us, as she walked down the street. An' then Sammy Hutton an' me, we turned to Sandy.

"Sandy," I says—an' there I stops short like a fool.

"She's quite right, Annie is," he says, "quite. I should have taken them off the schooner, of course. She's quite right."

He spoke like he'd made up his mind after

Digitized by Google

thinkin' a long time. Then he stares at us, sort of puzzled, an' half asleep.

"I'll be gettin' on," he says. "Good-by, till the mornin'." An' he goes off very quickly, just like Annie had done, lookin' straight ahead of him.

"He's takin' it hard," says Sammy Hutton. "But his sort do, always. Poor Sandy! He's well out of it, if he only knew."

Those few words that he'd had with Annie Fairfax made him see that life wasn't worth livin' an' in the end killed him as sure as if she'd taken a dagger an' plunged it into his heart.

He didn't make any attempt to see her. He seemed to have lost interest in everything. He mooned about by himself, drank a little more than was good for him an' didn't speak to a soul if he could help it. An' wherever he went an' whatever he did, he'd be lookin' as though he knew people were talkin' about him, pointin' their fingers after the man who'd abandoned the crew of a derelict schooner in mid-Atlantic. It was life, of course—just the everlastin',—— cruelty of life.

I made up my mind, however, I wouldn't rest easy till I'd seen Annie Fairfax myself an' told her the truth. So the next evenin' I was waitin' outside the place where she worked when she came out into the street.

"Miss Fairfax," I says, "Harrington's my name. I'm second engineer of the *Maid of Orleans*. I've met you before."

"Oh, yes," says she, "I remember you now."

Condescendin' she was, very; haughty, too, like the wife of a shipowner bein' shown over the vessel when the skipper's wife is aboard. She goes on quickly—

"Mr. Harrington, will you tell Mr. Morgan, please, that if he's anything to say he'd better say it himself."

"It wasn't him that sent me," I says. "I came of my own accord; he doesn't know. Miss Fairfax," I says, "don't you think you're a bit hard on Sandy? I know he did what you said he did, but it was for your sake."

"For my sake!" says she, surprised into bein' polite.

"Yes," says I, "the very same. He turned back to the *Maid of Orleans* because he was frightened he might be drowned."

"What's that to do with me?" she says.

"Don't you see," I says, "that if he were drowned you wouldn't get married! What would become of you without him? You mightn't starve, perhaps, but you'd have to drag on in that office of yours for how long? Till you were old an' worn out, too old to be worth your wages. An' what then? It was for that," I says, "to keep himself safe, to give you the home that he promised, that he didn't rescue the crew of that schooner. He'd have taken them off a hundred times over but for you, an' you know it."

"Do you think," she says, "do you think I could look at a man who sets no higher value on me than that? Let alone love him. Do you think, Mr. Harrington," she says, "that I'd marry a coward?"

"Sandy's no coward," I says. "Foolish he may be, but he's not afraid. It was for your happiness that he let himself do what he shouldn't have done. For that, an' nothin' more."

"For my happiness!" she says with a laugh. "It's a queer taste in happiness that you men have. But go on, I'm listenin'."

"Miss Fairfax," says I, feelin' like I was tryin' to coax the H. P. cylinder into runnin' with the cross-head bolt gone to blazes. "Miss Fairfax, you won't throw him over, now, will you? He'll be good to you," I says, "as good as a man can be to the girl that he loves. He's breakin' his heart this very minute just for you."

Did that have any effect? It did not, save to anger her. She looks at me up an' down the same as she looked at Sandy the day before, like I was something small an' mean.

An' yet at the back of it all I could see she was hurt; that she felt like he'd wronged her.

"He shamed himself an' his ship," she says, "an' he shamed me. If he'd been drowned in doin' his duty, I'd have worshipped his mem'ry for ever an' ever. As it is, I hate him. I'm workin' for next to nothin', I know. I'm sick an' I'm tired of bein' poor; I wanted a home an' a man who would care for me. But," she says, "Sandy Morgan is not that man an' he never will be." An' she walked off.

Did she care for Sandy at all? That, son, is a question that only one person alive could attempt to answer—an' that person, Annie Fairfax.

An' what did I think, myself? I didn't know. Perhaps I was more than inclined to agree with Sammy Hutton, that Sandy was well rid of her.

Digitized by Google

I SAW her again the night before we left Cardiff. What's more, Sandy was with me. We were caught in the crush outside a theater just as the performance was over, with the crowds pushin' this way an' that, in a hurry to get home.

"Come on, Sandy," I says, "let's get out of it."

But Sandy, he clutches hold of my arm. An' there when I looked 'round, there was Annie Fairfax passin' us with her eyes fixed in front of her like she saw nothin', an' her cheeks flamin' red. She saw us all right, of course.

Too unconscious she was, by a —— sight. She was not alone, neither. With her, holdin' her arm, was a man, stout, plump, well-fed, two chins an' a dark mustache, waxed at the ends—forty-five by the looks of him, maybe fifty—with a gold watch-chain across his waistcoat an' an air of likin' his meals. Now, who in thunder was he, I thought.

"Sandy," says I.

But, Lord! I'd have done more good addressin' remarks to the port H. P. valve spindles. He'd turned an' was followin'.

"Come back, Sandy," I says, not wishin' for trouble.

He kept on after her, his face pale an' very determined, like when he stood on the deck an' looked at the old man after he'd come back without the crew of the schooner.

"Annie," he says.

We were away from the crowd by this time, on a side street. She stopped an' faced him.

"Well," she says, "what is it now?"

She spoke hard an' sharp an' cold, same as a woman will speak when she's frightened what will be said to her in return.

"May I speak to you a minute, Annie?" he says.

"No," she says, "I won't listen."

Son, it was funny to hear 'em.

"You will," says Sandy. "I'll make you. Who's this?" he says, jerkin' his chin at the man with the waxed mustache.

"I'm a friend of Miss Fairfax," says he, "an' what business is it of yours?"

"Shut up!" says Sandy, an' the man with the waxed mustache looks like the end of the world had arrived unexpected. "Annie," says Sandy, "are you sure you're in safe hands?"

"Sandy," says I, "don't be a fool!"

"He's no coward, at least," says the girl.

"Oh!" says Sandy, growlin' like a dog over a bone. "Very good. It's as well for him he's with you or I'd spoil his looks just for the fun of the thing."

He doubles his fists an' steps forward.

The other backs away from him, quick.

"Annie," he says, "let's be goin'. I don't want to get into a brawl with a drunken sailor. I've my reputation to consider, if he hasn't."

"Wait," says the girl, an' she looks at Sandy with her eyes glarin'. "You've shown what you are," she says, "an' it's quite enough. I'll never speak to you again as long as I live."

An' then they went off an' left us standin' there under the lamp-post.

Sandy turns on his heel.

"Come on," he says, "let's have a drink."

After that he just seemed to be tryin' how far he could go. Money was no object. An' at last I took him by the scruff of his neck an' run him out of the bar we were in into the street.

"Sandy," says I, proppin' him up against the wall, "are you mad or what?"

"Mad!" says he, laughin' like he'd said something brilliant. "Harrington," he says, "I'm more sane than I ever was in my life before. I've done what I shouldn't have done, but there's time yet."

"What do you mean by that?" I says.

"Mean?" says he. "I've the taste of dust an' ashes in my mouth yet, an' it will take more than whisky to wash it away. That's all."

I didn't understand then, nor did I till maybe a month later.

"You fool, Sandy," says I, "you're drunk."

We went back to the ship slowly, arm in arm, he swayin' from side to side.

NEXT evenin' I was on the after deck havin' a last look shoreward, regrettin' the last drink that I might have had an' didn't, when I saw Sandy comin' toward me with his hands in his pockets. He sat down by my side on the hatch.

For a long time he said nothin'—just sat with his hands huggin' his knees.

"Another voyage," he says, "another long, mis'rable, weary voyage, an' what's at the end of it?"

"Why," says I, "home an' plenty to drink, an——"

Digitized by Google

I stopped then.

"What is it, Sandy?" I says. "What's troublin' you?"

He laughed.

"Nothin'!" Then he kind of groans like he was hurt. "What's there to live for?" he says.

"Don't be a —— fool!" I says quickly. But by the light of the moon I saw he was sufferin'.

"You mean well," he says, "but you don't understand, Harrington, an' maybe you never will."

He went on again in a low voice:

"I'm a coward, not fit for a decent man to speak to. I turned back when I should have gone on, because of her; because I couldn't face the thought of her bein' left all alone. An' now—she hates me."

"Taffy," I says, "she's not worth it."

As if that would comfort a man feelin' like he did! He turned on me sharp as a flash.

"Harrington," he says, "she's the best girl that I ever set eyes on, the best in the world. An' she's dead right. It 'ud have been better for me—an' her—if I'd been drowned that day a thousand times over than do what I did."

After that I knew how he was feelin'.

"Sandy," I says, "give yourself a chance. She'll come 'round in time. She's angry, perhaps, bein' young an' not understandin' men same as she will later. An' that man she was with last night, he's nothin'. You don't need to worry about him."

Sandy laughed.

"Lord!" he says. "I know that; he's old enough for her father. Annie won't take up with a man like him, I know, but she's done with me."

"Sandy," I says, thinkin' to comfort him somehow. "There's other girls in the world beside her."

He looks at me kind of scornful.

"Is there?" he says. "Not for me! There's no one but her."

I left him soon after, sittin' there on the hatch, with his shoulders humped an' his head in his hands.

Men act diff'rent. No two men take their sorrows the same way. Some put on that they don't care; others drink, same as some I could mention; others again just let themselves drift, like a tramp with its tail-end shaft broke in a heavy sea. Sandy was like that, he suffered. How he suffered! He hadn't the strength to try an' forget. He couldn't.

Lookin' back, I think that what worried him more than anything—settin' aside the fact that the girl wouldn't have him, an' that there was no hope that she ever would—was that he'd shamed himself for no purpose. We all of us knew that he'd let the Germans do what he was afraid of, an' only *I* knew the real reason, or believed it.

An' I think, son, even though none of the others ever so much as spoke of what he had done, not even the skipper, I think all the same that they were wonderin' what made him stay on the *Maid of Orleans*. By hard lyin' most people we'd met in Cardiff had come to believe that the Germans had rescued the men from the schooner before our boat could get near 'em, an' so if he'd only gone to another ship, which he could have, or stayed ashore till the owners gave him a ship of his own, he might have been happy. Or so they thought, all except me—I knew better.

There's some things in a man's life that he can not look back on without a feelin' of horror. This is one of them, what I'm tellin' you now.

WE'D been at sea two days, perhaps, after leavin' Ancona in northern Italy, an' were makin' for Messina to load for home when it happened. About two bells in my watch, five o'clock almost, I was leanin' against the bulkhead, lightin' my pipe.

The engine-room was pretty well crowded. Sammy Hutton washin' some clothes by the oil tanks, the donkey-man workin' the lathe, an' the chief fussin' over the bilge pump simply because he was never happy unless he was fussin' somewhere. I looked up, wavin' the match to an' fro, an' saw Sandy Morgan at the foot of the ladder.

"Hullo, Sandy!" I says, rather surprised. "What's up?"

He hadn't been down in the engine-room the whole trip.

"Oh, nothin'," says he. "It's nearly tea-time, an' I thought I'd just see how you were."

"How do, Mr. Morgan!" says the chief comin' 'round between us an' the cranks, wipin' his hands on a piece of waste. "How are you these days?"

"Fine," says Sandy, lookin' the least little bit shy, for the chief hadn't so much as

Digitized by Google

noticed him since the day he'd turned back from the schooner.

"Oh!" says he. "I'm glad of that, Mr. Morgan, but you don't look it."

"I'll be all right when we reach home," says Sandy, tryin' to grin same as he used to.

"Reach home!" says the chief, an' then he says what he wouldn't have said if he'd known. "It's more than home that you're wantin' to see," he says. "There's somebody waitin', isn't there? You're a lucky man, Mr. Morgan."

Sandy swallowed hard, an' looked like he was wonderin' what under Heaven to say next. Poor devil! Poor, poor devil! He didn't know, nor did I, nor any one of us. How could we?

AN' THEN, just as I turned to speak to the trimmer on watch who'd come in to look at the time, there was a sudden crash from the stoke-hole which he'd left only a second before, an' a rush of steam, an' a shriek of a man in mortal agony, a shriek that turned your heart sick to hear. I just dropped the pipe out of my hand an' didn't move for a second, an' the trimmer claws at the chief.

"He's in there," he says. "In there, do you hear?"

An' what did it all mean, eh—the explosion an' the rush of steam an'everything? Nothin' much, only one of the stoppers we'd put into a boiler tube to stop a leak had blown out, that's all.

It was death in the stoke-hole for any man born of woman, at that moment, a death that I hated to think of. I just stood shiverin' there by the bulkhead. Then I jumped to stop her, while the chief shook off the trimmer an' telegraphed the bridge.

That was all we could do; stop the engines an' wait till we could go into the stoke-hole without bein' scalded. When we could we'd be able to ease the safety-valve an' draw the fires to reduce the pressure of steam on the boilers. That's all. There was no hope for the fireman who'd been caught, not the least in the world.

"My God!" says the chief under his breath. "Poor, poor beggar! He's dead by this time—dead or dyin', an' we can't help him."

"What's that?" says Sandy. "Is there any one in there?"

His face was drawn an' white.

"Any one in there!" I says. "Of course there is," an' I spoke sharp, bein' sick at the thought of it. "The fireman!"

An' before I could even guess what was comin', Sandy Morgan elbows me out of the way, tearin' his coat off as fast as he can. I made a clutch at him, but he swore at me an' was too quick.

"You fool!" I says. "You'll be scalded to death! Come out of it!"

Not he! We couldn't stop him, no more than you could the L. P. crank when she's racin', just by puttin' your little finger on it. He just brushed us aside an' dived into the clouds of steam that were comin' out of the door that led to the stoke-hole, with his coat thrown over his head.

What could we do—the rest of us? He'd gone into that hell of steam in cold blood, knowin' all that must happen. Did we follow him? Son, we did not, not bein' eager to die before our time.

We waited, hours it seemed, but it couldn't have been minutes even, till we heard footsteps staggerin' toward us, down the alleyway between the boilers an' the stringers. Son, it's gospel truth, Sandy Morgan had found the fireman an' was bringin' him back, out of the stoke-hole.

We heard him comin' nearer an' nearer, stumblin' when he was quite close to the door an' fallin' headlong. Then we crept into the alleyway ourselves, Sammy an' me, an' dragged the pair of them into the engine-room. An' if we were burned, Sammy an' me, just by that, think what it was for Sandy Morgan!

Son, if I live for a thousand years I'll never forget it. Them poor fellers lyin' side by side on the engine-room platform! In my dreams sometimes, the worst of 'em, I can see Sandy Morgan, the way he looked then. The coat 'round his head hadn't helped him much. He was still alive an' breathin' a little in sobs.

"Sandy," I says, "Sandy, you poor old chap——"

He opens his poor eyes, an', son, this is the truth, smiles. But what a smile! Son, he spoke to us, he did so, that poor wreck of a man dyin' as fast as he could.

"Is he alive?" says he.

"Yes," says I, an' I hadn't the heart to tell him the truth—that the feller he'd carried out of that inferno was dead an' had been when he found him.

Digitized by Google

"That's good," says he. "Does that wipe out the day I turned back?"

"Good God!" says I.

"The finest thing I ever saw in my life," says the chief.

Sandy gives a little sigh like he was happy.

"I'm all burned inside," he says.

Then his breathin' gets fainter an' fainter. I leaned over him, seein' he was doin' his best to speak.

"Tell her," he says, "tell Annie, an' ask if I'd lived would it have made any diff'rence?"

That was the last thing he said.

"He's dead," says the chief, an' he was.

Well, son, that was the way Sandy Morgan went out. He had no hope of bringin' his man out alive, but—he risked it.

He went into that hell of steam, that blindin', blisterin', burnin' steam, that strips the flesh off your bones almost, an groped around till he found the fireman an' carried him out. Brave! It was more than brave! It was the kind of thing you can't imagine or think of, not properly. How he did it, God only knows. Just sheer willpower an' courage. Nothin' else.

When I straightened up there was the skipper who'd come down to the engine-room to see what the blazes was wrong, wipin' his eyes an' blubberin', not carin' who saw him.

"An'," says he, "that was the man I thought was a coward."

He turns an' climbs up the ladder again, leavin' us with the dead.

We buried them early the next mornin', in the forenoon watch, on a day of sunshine an' blue sky an' calm sea, with the coast of Italy clear an' distinct, mountains an' valleys an' little white towns near at hand.

"Harrington," says the chief, after it was all over an' the ship was once more under way. "Harrington, what did poor Sandy mean by sayin' would it make any diff'rence?"

"What did he mean?" I says. "I don't know."

But I did know, of course. It meant that if Annie Fairfax had made him turn back from the schooner, so had she made him die for the sake of a man who was dead. An', rememberin' what Sandy had been before he set eyes on her, I could feel it in my heart to hate that girl more than I ever hated a girl before or since.

THE news was home long before we were, though the voyage was as short a one as I've ever made. If he'd have lived, they'd have given Sandy Morgan medals an' things, of course. As it was, all he got was about a column in each of the London papers, wedged in between the account of some actress runnin' off with some one else's husband, an' a fight in India.

"What's more they called it the bravest deed of the year, which it was; also the most foolish, though they didn't know that. An' if they—the papers—hadn't believed that about Sandy Morgan leavin' the crew of the schooner to die, they didn't need to be told twice about him carryin' the dead fireman out of the stoke-hole aboard of the *Maid of Orleans*. I wondered what Annie Fairfax would think when she read it—if she would understand.

As quick as I could, when we reached Cardiff—we discharged at Bristol—I set out in search of the girl. At the office they told me she'd left over a month before, an' they didn't know if she was workin' or not, but they gave me the name of the place where she lived.

I found it easy enough, a small house, shabby an' respectable, in a small, shabby street. I knocked at the door an', when a small maid-servant opened it, said that I wanted Miss Fairfax.

She looked at me like she was puzzled, then she showed me into the front room, all over photos of stout women an' curly-haired men in gilt frames, life-sized, with wax fruit under glass shades, an' horsehair furniture.

"Miss Fairfax will be down in a minute or two," says the girl, an' I waited, strollin' around, lookin' at the pictures an' listenin' to the whispers up-stairs an' the shufflin' of feet an' some gigglin'. Then, after a while, Annie comes into the room.

"Well," she says, without any beatin' about. "Do you want to see me?"

"I do," says I. "I've a message from some one you used to know."

An' I stared her full in the face, tryin' to guess what she was thinkin' about an' wonderin' why she had changed so. She looked tired an' washed out, thin in the cheeks an' dark under the eyes like she hadn't been sleepin'.

"From some one I used to know!" she says, repeatin' the words to herself.

"Yes, from Sandy Morgan," I says.

Digitized by Google

"You read of his death in the papers, I suppose?"

"Yes," she says, "I read of it."

"He died bravely," I says, "an' he gave me a message to give to you. Would it—the goin' into the stoke-hole after the fireman—have made any diff'rence?"

I waited, an' her lips went white an' the pink in her face faded.

"Any diff'rence!" she says.

She stopped like she was thinkin', an' I wondered what would come next.

"He was kind to me, was Sandy," she says, after a time, "an' I treated him badly, but he shouldn't have turned back from that schooner, not—not even for me. Would it have made any diff'rence?" she says slowly. "Any diff'rence if he had saved that fireman? An' lived?"

"Yes," says I, "that's what he asked me when he was dyin'."

She stared at me with her lips quiverin' an' a look of pain in her blue eyes.

"I don't know," she says. "I don't know."

An' then a stout woman, one of them that was in the photographs, looks into the room.

"Annie," she says kind of frightened. "Annie, what's come to you? You mustn't stay here all the mornin' talkin'; the carriage will be here at twelve, an' it's time you was dressin'. An', Annie, there's some one just called with some flowers. He wants you to see him," she says. "It ain't reg'lar, perhaps, but you'd better." An' then she knows that there's something wrong. "Annie," she says, "what's wrong? What are you cryin' for?"

"Go away," says the girl, an' she was cryin' in dead earnest, sittin' all huddled up on the sofa. "Leave me alone," she says, "I don't want to see any one, not even him. I won't!"

The stout woman backs out of the room, lookin' scared.

"I don't want to see him again, ever," says the girl in a little whisper. "But I have to; I must. It's too late for that—too late."

"What is it?" I says, frightened by the way that she spoke. "Is there anything wrong? It's not—not a funeral?" I says. "Is it?"

An' at that the girl shrinks back an' stares at me with her hand to her throat.

"A—a what?" she says, just like that. An' then she begins to laugh an' laugh. "A funeral," she says. "I wish it was, almost. No, Mr. Harrington, it's not a funeral, it's a weddin', mine. I'm to be married this afternoon."

She began to cry once more, rockin' her body to an' fro, her hands to her face an' her head droopin'.

I went out, feelin' like I'd done something I shouldn't, an' in the hall was the stout woman an' two others whisperin'; an' with them, holdin' a bouquet of white flowers, the red-faced man with the two chins an' the waxed mustache, the man that I'd seen with Annie Fairfax the night before we left Cardiff the last voyage. He glared at me like he wanted to choke me, knowin' quite well who I was, of course.

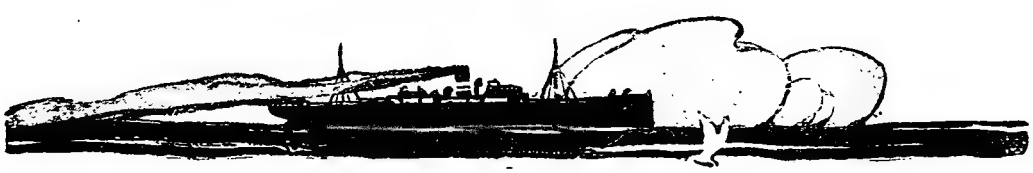
"What is it?" says the stout woman. "What's happenin'?"

I shook her off gently.

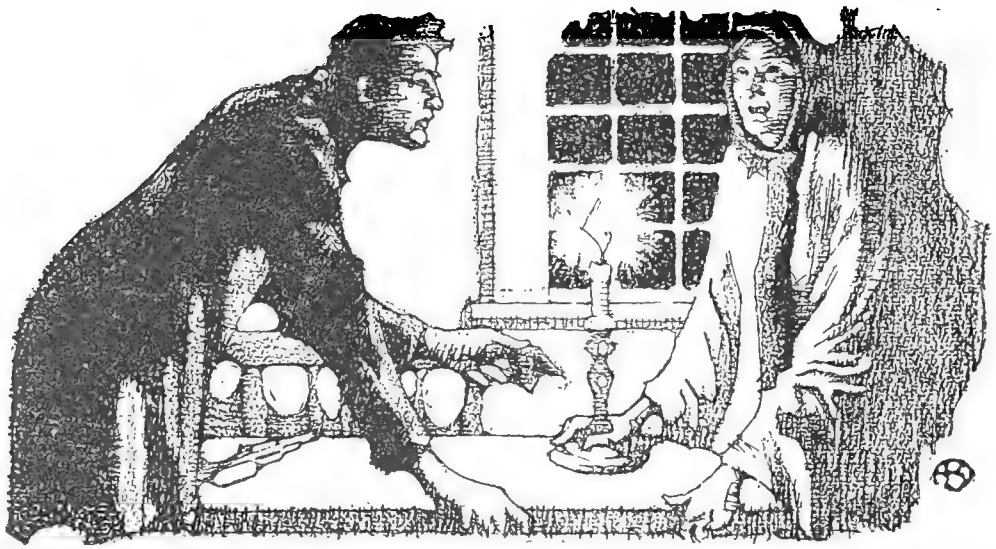
"I don't know," I says, an' I didn't, not then; an' I don't even now, not to this day.

I opened the front door an' let myself cut into the wet, leavin' the women whisperin' in the narrow hall, an' the man pickin' one of the flowers to pieces, an' the girl he was goin' to marry that afternoon sobbin' her heart out.

An' what had she meant by sayin' that about it bein' too late? Too late to what? It's all of a piece with everything else—a mystery, something you can only guess at, without bein' able to make sure of. But there's one thing I'd like to be told, an' that is, what responsibility will Annie Fairfax have on the Day of Judgment for the killin' of Sandy Morgan? An' that's a question it's not worth tryin' to answer.



Digitized by Google



THE PATCH

By Hapsburg Liebe

Author of "The Silent Torreys," etc.

HE SANG out of the fulness of his great, uncouth heart as he strode up the laurel-bordered mountain-trail that led to his people—and to Julie, his sweetheart since he could remember. The four years he had spent in the West had not seared his memory one whit. He knew every tree, every cliff; they were like old friends to him.

He paused at a white-barked beech and looked with high-beating heart at the grown-over initials, T. B. and J. F. He remembered so distinctly—he had kissed her there. He went on, still singing, and stopped—still singing—at another beech; there he saw another set of the same initials, and he remembered that he had kissed her there also.

And at the third beech he saw that their initials had been recently renewed! Tom Burlison ceased to sing—for it was here that she had promised; he ran his big fingers gently over the letters that Julie Fowler had cut with her own little hand. Then he smiled and hurried onward.

The hounds knew him when he neared the home cabin—Rock, and Ring, and Hunter. They announced his arrival with joyous whines of welcome; they leaped almost to his face, and he did not scold them because they soiled his best suit. He passed the sagging gate and walked slowly and expectantly up the worn path—the last stretch of his long journey home.

The door opened, and an old man, booted and bearded and gray, poorly clad but stalwart, appeared, shading his eyes from the low afternoon sun with a gnarled, horny hand.

"Tom!" he cried. "Is that you, Tom?"

"Yes, pap," smiled Tom, trying bravely to keep back the choke his happiness rushed into his throat, "it's shore Tom, come back home in time to eat his twenty-second birthday dinner with you and mother. My birthday's next Chuesday, you know."

An old woman, shawled and bonneted, came into sight around a bend in the path that led to the spring. She set the pail of water down and hurried to embrace her big, strong son from the far West.

"Why, how he has growed—little Tommy, thar. Hain't he, pap?" she jubilated. "Did you ever see the like? Now, honey, I know you're shore as hongry as a b'ar; so you jest set down thar and talk to yore pap ontil I can stir up a bite to eat——"

She returned for the pail of water, and disappeared inside the cabin doorway. Tom sank to the steps, both hands patting the heads of the hounds. The old man also sat down—and Tom noted with a gulp the difference between his clothing and that of his father.

"Well," the younger man asked awkwardly, pushing back his broad-rimmed hat, "what's the news?"

Old Bill Burlison knew very well that his son wished to know something about Julie Fowler.

"We've had a mighty bad happenin'—it

Digitized by Google

was a week ago," he said regretfully. "Somebody killed Julie's pap, up on the side o' the Bald—shot him squar' 'atween the eyes."

Tom went to his feet, his face white, his eyes glittering, his jaw-muscles trembling.

"Somebody killed Mart Fowler—Julie's pap!" he exclaimed in a voice that was hoarse and shaking with anger. "Didn't they never find out who done it?"

The old man shook his head.

"They hain't found a thing," he answered. "Mart was a-layin' in a bunch o' lorrels, with his rifle aside of him and a bloody hole in his fore'ead, is all anybody knows for shore. The only suspicion anybody has is that it might ha' been done by the feller—whoever he was—who turned Mart up for 'stillin' whisky last Fall; the idee is, y'know, Tom, that a feller who would turn up a still is mean enough to do anything."

"Did pore little Julie take it hard?" asked Tom, his eyes glowing with a sudden moisture.

"I thought she'd die when we carried her dead pap into the house and put him on a bed," said Bill Burlison. "Mart was a bad man; but it always seemed to me that the bad ones was the very ones the womenfolks loved the most. And when Julie got sort o' quiet, why, she told the whole crowd that she'd marry the man who found out who done the killin'—you see, Tom, Julie's the prettiest thing that ever put a shoetrack in the earth o' these here mountains, son, and every young man in the county is dead in love with her."

Tom Burlison had gone white again.

"Tell mother not to hurry supper on my account," he said, and went down the path with the three hounds following him closely. "I'm a-goin' over to see Julie Fowler."

He walked rapidly up the mountain, crossed its pine-fringed crest, and shortly afterward arrived at the clearing and the cabin of the man who had been found dead among the laurel.

JULIE was sitting on the woodpile, playing thoughtfully with her fingers. Tom saw that she had matured during his absence; that she was no longer a girl, but a full-grown woman; and he noted, despite the warring emotions within him that she was indeed as pretty as his father had declared. She arose as he approached her, and held out her right hand with a very wan smile.

"Tom," she said lowly, "I'm shore glad to see you."

Under the spell of her presence, Tom Burlison forgot for the moment that he was angry with her for her impulsive offer to marry the man who would find the taker of her father's life. He put out his arms to gather her to him, but Julie backed away and turned a little pale.

"Not now, Tom," she said firmly. "Tom, have you heerd about pap?"

"Yes, and I also heerd about that thar fool offer you made," Tom mumbled bitterly.

Julie sank to her knees before him, her face hid in her hands, a sob shaking her.

"Don't—please don't!" she begged pitifully. "You ought to be big enough to forgive me for that. Tom, I owe all that I am, whether I'm good or bad—and sometimes, Tom, I think I'm mostly bad—to pore old pap."

She was looking upward now, her face tear-streaked, her wet eyes pleading as if for the right to live.

"Tom," she continued, "I hain't forgot. I still remember the promises we made four year ago; I couldn't never forgit them. Bless yore heart, dear Tom, it's you that I love, and only you; but I'd give myself away to find the man who shot my pap. If you can do it, I'll marry you—and God knows I shore hope that you'll be the one."

Burlison understood, for the wild spirit of the everlasting hills had been born in him, too. His face softened; he lifted Julie from her knees, and stood gently stroking her quivering hands.

"Little sweetheart," he whispered earnestly, "I'll find him. I'll be the one, never fear. Yonder's yore mother, Julie."

A faded, saddened woman was stepping from the cabin door, busily drying her wrinkled, mannish hands on a checked cotton apron that hung from her large waist.

"Well, if it hain't little Tommy Burlison!" she exclaimed, trying to smile a welcome. "But not sech a little Tommy, now. How you have growed, Tommy! Did you hear about the bad luck we had, Tommy?"

Young Burlison looked her straight in the eye.

"I heerd about it when I first got home," he answered, "and I started right on over

Digitized by Google

here. I'll git the man who done it, Mis' Fowler; you leave it to me."

Mrs. Fowler dropped wearily to a seat on the woodpile; Tom sat down beside her. The girl went slowly to the cabin.

"Thar is a question I want to ax you, Mis' Fowler," said Tom, "and I shore hope you'll pardon me a-seemin' so nosey, seein' that it's because I'm int'rested in you folks. Are you a-needin' of anything you hain't got—have you got a plenty to eat?"

He reddened and looked away. Mrs. Fowler understood perfectly; she did not blame him for his inquisitiveess.

"Bless the good heart o' you, Tommy Burlison!" she said. "No, we hain't a-needin' of anything at all. Every trap Mart had set in the Slate Gorge, his best trappin' place, is a-catchin' a 'coon or something 'most every night; the hens is all a-layin' fit to kill theirselves; and one o' our old hogs come a-walkin' up this mornin' with eighteen o' the finest pigs you ever seen!"

"Eighteen!" repeated Tom Burlison wonderingly. "That's what I'd call a' oncommon number, Mis' Fowler."

"It is a mighty oncommon number," the old woman agreed quickly. "Tom Burlison, it's the goodness o' the Lord, that's what it is. I tell you, He hain't a-goin' to let——"

Her voice died away.

Head in hands, Tom did not look up when he heard her walking slowly toward the cabin. A moment later he felt a hand fall lightly on his shoulder. It was Julie.

"What a good boy you are, Tom!" she said, and turned her face away. "Tom, w-won't you stay for supper? We're a-goin' to have a squirrel that I killed myself."

"Much obliged," replied Tom, rising to his feet. "I guess I'd better be a-goin'. Whar did them thar durned dogs o' mine git to, Julie—yander they are; I see 'em, now. S'long, Julie."

"Good-by, Tom," called the girl. "I hope you'll find out who done it, Tom."

Burlison turned suddenly.

"Who seems the most anxious to catch the guilty party?" he flashed.

"Sam Beardsley!" the girl called after him.

TOM had not covered half the distance that lay between the Fowler cabin and that of his parents when he met Sam Beardsley, a loosely built young fellow with shifting eyes and an ever-present rifle in the hollow of his arm. They talked of the tragedy; and when Tom Burlison declared that the honor of apprehending the murderer should be his, Beardsley frowned darkly and passed on.

Tom did not mention his suspicions concerning Beardsley to his father and mother. At the table he questioned his father in a general way. And he was somewhat chagrined to learn that Sam Beardsley and Mart Fowler had been apparently the best of friends; that nobody had left the vicinity; that everybody had quarreled with Mart Fowler at divers times.

"Pap," said Tom, stretching one hand across the oilcloth-covered table, "I want you to help me."

The old man took the hand in a hearty grip.

"We'll find out about it," he said, "if it takes us the rest of our lives."

Bill Burlison and Tom took chairs in the doorway, in the gathering twilight. After a few minutes of silence, the younger man looked up.

"Pap," he asked, "how's coon-trappin' now?"

"Not much," answered the elder Burlison, shaking his head.

"How's the hens a-layin'?"

"Not much."

"What's the most pigs you ever seen in one bunch?" pursued Tom.

"Fo'teen, I reckon," smiled the old man.

"Mis' Fowler's old hog come a-strollin' in this mornin' with eighteen," said Tom.

"Well, I do say!" came the voice of Mrs. Burlison. "It do beat all! 'Pears like the good Lord is shore a-takin' care of 'em, Tommy; it shore do."

Tom went to his feet, his head almost touching the top of the doorway. For a moment he looked silently from one parent to the other, while each of them gazed wonderingly at him, waiting for him to speak.

"It ain't the Lord!" declared Tom. "Pap and mother, the Fowlers is a-gittin' loads o' eggs when hens hain't a-layin' much, and lots o' game in the traps when traps hain't a-catchin' much, besides an onnatural number o' pigs. Whoever killed Mart Fowler is sorry he done it; and has been a-takin' 'em game and eggs—and he has added to the pig-litter by about half!"

Bill Burlison rose also, banging one horny fist into the other hand.

"By gyar!" he exclaimed enthusiastically.

Digitized by Google

"I'd never ha' thought o' that. Tommy, we'll jest sneak down and keep a watch over them thar coon traps o' the Fowlers.

Tom Burlison was already fumbling in his cheap suitcase for other and less valuable clothing; also he took out and placed on the table a new, long-barreled revolver of a late pattern. The old man took down a long rifle of the muzzle-loading variety, examined the priming, and replaced the cap with a fresh one.

When darkness had fallen, the pair started for Slate Gorge, a mile beyond the cabin of the Fowlers. When they had reached the deep, dark cove in which were the traps that dead Mart Fowler had set, they chose a point from which they could watch over two of the steel-jawed things, and sank to the leaves under a giant poplar.

Thus they waited patiently. The far-away baying of a long-tongued hound and the mournful cry of a shivering owl were the only sounds that they had heard except their own breathing, however, when the first dim rays of the dawn had begun to steal up from the east.

Bill Burlison went stiffly to his feet.

"Tom," he said, "le's go."

Together they stole across the silent mountain and to their home, where the old woman had a steaming breakfast waiting for them. After they had eaten, they undressed and went to bed; for they meant to be fresh for another long night's vigil. And this time they meant to separate, one of them watching the traps, the other watching the hen-house of the Fowlers. But on that night, also, they saw nothing out of the ordinary.

In the afternoon, Tom decided to go to see Julie. He found the girl sitting on the woodpile, as before. She looked up smilingly as he approached, and he noted with a feeling of thankfulness that she seemed much brighter than she had been when he had last visited her.

"Well," she inquired, "have you found out anything?"

Tom shook his head gloomily and sat down on a hickory log beside her.

"Hens still a-layin'? Traps still a-catchin'?" he wanted to know, turning his face slowly toward her.

"Not for two days," answered Julie.

"When did you see Sam Beardsley last, Julie?"

"This mornin'."

"What did you and him talk about?"

"Not much of anything," the girl said readily. "He wanted to know if I liked you; and I told him I liked you better than anybody in the world. Also I believe I told him that you was shore a-goin' to be the one to find the man who shot pore pap."

"What did he say to that?" Tom asked quickly.

"He said, 'We'll see about it!'" answered Julie.

For a long time they were silent, then Tom arose to go.

"Did him and yore pap have any disputes as you know of afore yore pap was killed?" Tom pursued doggedly.

"Not as I know of," said Julie.

"Tonight, I'll watch Sam Beardsley," thought Tom as he walked homeward.

He told his father of this decision. The elder Burlison was pleased with it. So, after dark, the young man armed himself with his new revolver and slipped away, going in the direction of Old Man Beardsley's cabin—beyond the Slate Gorge, at the head of a smaller cove.

Tom stole, shadowlike up to the rail fence that shut in the little clearing, crossed it, and went, stooping low, down through the apple-trees and to the little log barn where he paused to listen. The sudden growling of an alert watchdog came to his ears.

Young Burlison realized with a hard frown that he would not be able to get near enough to the cabin to eavesdrop. He walked cautiously up the mountainside until he stood at a point opposite the one door of the habitation of logs. Here he picked up a pebble and tossed it to the roof below. Old Man Beardsley came to the door with a long rifle in his hands, looked about him for a moment and then withdrew.

Tom stole back across the mountains. He knew that Sam Beardsley was not at home.

AS HE walked quietly through the woods, the thought occurred to him to pass by the Fowler traps, it being but little out of his way. Accordingly, he turned his footsteps to the left, and was soon stealing carefully down among the shadows of the trees in deep Slate Gorge.

When he had reached the bottom, not an object could he see because of the darkness. He felt his way along until he had come to

Digitized by Google

the big poplar by the creek, where two traps were set close together. Here he sank to the ground and became silent.

And this time his vigil did not go unrewarded.

From one side of the gorge there tumbled a bit of slate which stopped only when it had struck the creek with a little splash. It was too dark to see the oncoming figure as yet; but Tom Burlison cocked his revolver noiselessly and strained his eyes toward the source of the rolling stone. Shortly afterward he heard a man's boot slip over a ledge, while the other foot snapped a twig as its owner caught himself from falling.

Burlison went to his feet, his left hand resting against the big poplar, his right hand holding the pistol in readiness.

A few minutes more, and a tall, dim figure loomed before the young mountaineer—and in its hands were a pair of small, furry animals that Tom Burlison knew were raccoons. Something about it touched Tom's heart, and he lowered the revolver as he watched the other spring the steel jaws of a trap on the leg of one of his gifts.

But Tom had sworn that he would catch that man. He sprang close before the stooping form, and cried tensely—

"Hands up!"

The figure leaped erect as if it had been smitten in the face, its head striking Tom Burlison on the chin, one of its quickly raising arms sending the cocked revolver flying several yards away. Then the mysterious person seized Tom's shoulders with a pair of iron-like hands and crushed him downward. Tom grasped one of the huge legs; but its owner tore away, turned and fled rapidly down the cove, soon disappearing from sight.

Tom Burlison sat up, rubbing his chin, which felt numb from the blow it had received. Dimly he realized that he held something soft in his left hand—a bit of cloth. It was a patch that he had torn from the guilty one's clothing.

A patch! The badge of extreme poverty, the thing all mankind hates to wear. And yet this poor man was doing all in his power to provide for the woman he had widowed and the daughter he had orphaned by the crook of his trigger finger. Tom Burlison began to reflect.

Mart Fowler had been a quarrelsome man, a moonshiner, a breaker of the laws of his country, a sneerer at good things. Perhaps the person who had killed Mart Fowler had had sufficient cause; perhaps it had been a case of shoot quick or be shot!

Tom found his revolver and thrust it into his pocket—it and the patch—and made his way slowly homeward in the gloom of the silent, mountain night. His mother, still awake, opened the door for him, a flickering candle in her hand. She was quick to note the worried look on her son's strong face.

"Tommy," she breathed, "what's the matter?"

She set the candle on the crude dining-table and put her arms about his neck, drawing his head down until her old lips could touch his forehead with mingled love and reverence.

The son slowly drew from his pocket a bit of cloth. He held it to the candle, and bent toward it eagerly, saying—

"The man who wore this patch is the man who shot Mart Fowler—I mighty nigh caught him over in the Slate Gorge."

His mother had straightened with a pitiful cry, a cry that had been wrung from the very bottom of her patient, mother-heart.

She had recognized the patch—and she was sure her son would know it. It had been torn from the knee of old Bill Burlison, the husband of one, the father of the other! The old woman sank, sobbing, to the floor.

"Little Tommy," she begged, raising her tear-wet eyes, "I wisht you could forgive him for doin' it, and me for keepin' it a secret from you. Tommy, he had to kill Mart—Mart would ha' killed him if he hadn't done it. Mart had got a fool notion in his head that it was yore pap who turned up his still. We didn't want you to know it, nor anybody else, 'cause we knowed you and Julie had loved each other 'most all yore lives.

"Little Tommy, you mustn't blame yore pore old pap. Look at that thar patch offen his knee, Tommy, and you'll see that it's got mud ground into it. Tommy, yore pore pap is old, and he feels like he cain't git forgiveness for takin' a human life, even if it was done in savin' hisself; he gits down on his knees in that thar mudhole ahind o' the barn every night to pray. Tommy, the A'mighty won't never hold nothin' ag'inst a man like that!"

Tom Burlison, son of his father, son of his mother, quivered at the lip, dragged a

Digitized by Google

sleeve across his eyes and lifted the old woman tenderly to her feet.

"We'll never let him know," he said. "We'll never let him know."

MAN HOUR after midnight Bill Burlison stole in, undressed, and went stealthily to bed; and after he had gone to sleep, his wife sewed back the patch on one knee of his worn trousers.

At the breakfast table the next day, Tom looked across a steaming dish of potatoes and said to his father:

"I mighty nigh caught that thar feller last night, over at the traps. But I got to thinkin' afterward that a man who would try to provide for Mart's folks hain't the sort o' man who could ha' killed Mart without a powerful good reason, and we hain't a-goin' to hunt that thar feller no more. Pap, he's a better man nor me, I be durned if he hain't. As far as Julie's offer is concerned, why, by gyar, I'm a-goin' to take a preacher over thar today and marry her anyhow!"

Which he did, to Julie's secret delight.

THE BLACK DEATH

A SIR JOHN HAWKWOOD STORY

By Marie Polk Angellotti

Author of "The Sir John Hawkwood Stories"

IT IS the law of life that none of us can work on forever without rest. Even the stormy petrel dozes in fair weather, and the best hunting dogs when the chase is ended, will stretch himself before the fire, drop his head on his paws and snore away the night. So it is with soldiers, too; for at the very worst of a siege there will often come a lull, and then the odds are that the combatants, instead of using the breathing-space to recommend their souls to heaven, will fall to earth like so many logs and be fast asleep within the instant.

For my part, I am as well pleased with my trade as the next man, let him be who he may, and if you care to ask questions about me in Italy you can soon learn that I am not called a do-nothing. But for all that, being human like other folk, I have my lazy moments, and I recall—with good reason, as you shall hear—a certain day some five years past, when I felt that unless I could banish wars, plots, and treaties from my thoughts for a bit, I should shortly go mad.

No doubt I experienced this perverse desire, as it seems a man's nature to do, simply because there appeared to be no chance of gratifying it. I had just ended a three-months' campaign against a veritable hornet's nest of foes.

The fighting had been desperate, and to crown all, the plague—or the Black Death, to give it the name by which it goes hereabouts—had been afoot in the neighborhood and had cost me more men than I could spare. Now, with a safe conduct and a score of troopers, I was on my way back to Florence through the conquered, sullen

Digitized by Google

territory, to settle with the Signoria what peace terms should be granted, and to return hot-foot to enforce them.

Altogether, the future bade fair to prove sufficiently lively, and when on the heels of my wish for rest I saw my own little lordship of Montecchio rise before me, I promptly told myself that it was a pity indeed if I might not spend a night now and again about my own affairs, and that, if the heavens fell thereafter, I meant to forget for a few hours all things in the world save good food and wine.

It was scarce a place where most men would have cared to take their leisure, this Montecchio, for it perched on a hill in the very heart of the Arezzo, between Cortona and Castiglione, with Siena to westward—nestled in, you perceive, among the cities which I had just been fighting, and which at intervals I had fought for years. But to me at least its disadvantages had proved a godsend, and I was wont to regard them with a most indulgent eye, since the prudent Florentines had been moved to offer me the stronghold for the very reason that the game of defending it against its hostile neighbors seemed to them not worth the candle.

Well, I had taken the gift with a sober face, rebuilt its walls, and put a castellan in charge to hold it in the teeth of who might attack.

Never yet, as I watched my revenues fatten, had I regretted my decision, but never had I recalled it with such complacency as on the present night, when I ate a hearty meal before my own castle hearthstone and for the nonce consigned all Italian squabbles to the deuce.

Having taken my last mouthful, I was in a mood for some cheery talk over my wine, so it put me in the best possible humor when steps sounded outside and the door opened to reveal my castellan, one Roger Thornbury, who had been an officer of my White Company until I sent him to rule Montecchio.

We had been acquainted in England, he and I, in the days when we were a pair of lads with our heads full of John-o'-dreams visions of soldiering; and as he was the only man in Italy of whom I could say as much, I had for him a certain fondness which he returned by a real devotion. So I greeted him now with a good deal of cordiality.

"HA, ROGER!" I cried. "Draw your chair to the fire and fill your cup! Well, and how have affairs marched since my last visit, eh? If you have not squeezed the last *soldo* of rents and cattle tolls from my tenants, you had best tremble! Come, hand them over, man," and I pointed to the fat bag in his hold, which clinked most comfortably as he advanced.

I had thought he would pay my words the tribute of a chuckle, since it was an old jest between us that I should pick flaws in his reckoning and accuse him of filling his pockets at my expense. But to my discomfiture, he looked as solemn as a man who attends a funeral.

"It has been a good year," he informed me sepulchraly, rather as if he were announcing that every one in Montecchio was dead.

From past experience I knew only too well what this half grim, half desperate manner meant. No doubt because I was his one link with a world of splendor and success which he could never hope to touch in person, Roger paid me the compliment to make me his chief interest in life, and at risk of seeming ungrateful I must say that he showed his solicitude in such a fashion as I would have endured for nothing on earth save old time's sake.

For example, although he was, to do him justice, perfectly indifferent to danger on his own account, he took any peril of mine with a seriousness little short of maddening, and whenever he learned that in my war-making I had run some risk which seemed to him a trifle too daring, he thought it his part as my oldest friend to rate me for it like any schoolboy. Something of the sort was in the wind now. My visions of a cheerful evening began to go a-glimmering, together with my temper.

"Well, what is amiss?" I snapped irritably. "Do you take me for the plague in person, that you look so glum? And can you not sit down, as I bade you? The saints grant me patience, for I need it when I get a welcome like this!"

My castellane raised both hands and shook them like a man beside himself.

"Why did you come here, Sir John? What ill wind blew you to us now, of all times?" he stormed at me by way of a hospitable greeting. "I tell you I would give Montecchio, yes gladly, to have you safe in Florence——"

Digitized by Google

"Upon my word!" I exclaimed, staring at him. "Then perhaps you will do me the favor to recall, my friend, that Montecchio is mine and not yours, and that I have a fancy to keep it a while longer!"

His response was mystifying.

"Are you mad, Sir John, to take your ease before the fire at a time like this?" he cried. "Come out with me, follow me for one half-hour with a shut mouth and open eyes—then tell me, if you can, that some black mischief is not brewing hereabouts!"

The hall was warm, the wine good, and my chair comfortable; so his request was by no means welcome, and I told him flatly that if I did any such thing, the fiends had my leave to fly away with me immediately afterward. At this he subsided into the chimney corner, a picture of gloom. But if I thought he had given up the battle, I was doomed to be disappointed.

"I expected as much," he croaked like a raven. "Never yet, Sir John, did I see you turn a hand to guard your life. It is plain you want to die. And her ladyship? It matters nothing, eh, that she should be left a widow and rue the day when she gave up so much to wed a soldier who will not even try to foil his foes?"

The wretch had an almost diabolical gift for piercing my armor, and that last thrust of his worked on me as nothing else would have done. I held out for some five minutes more out of pure stubbornness and then rose sulkily, picked up my cloak from the nearby settle, and stalked stiffly and wearily out of the hall in my castellan's triumphant wake.

NIGHT had fallen three hours since, and the moon was up. Passing through the courtyard—where I sighed enviously to see my troopers, a deal luckier than their master, contentedly doing justice to the wine I had sent out—we entered the town by the castle gate.

Montecchio is a small place, and its people are for the most part sheep-tenders or field-tillers who can not stop abed after cock-crow. So all things appeared wrapped in slumber as my castellan, with a manner which reminded me forcibly of a night thief, led me down a narrow street and into a yet narrower one, and finally, always imploring me fervently to move without noise, drew me into a tiny dark doorway, from which a winding staircase led up into blackness.

"Sit down, Sir John," said he in an impressive whisper. "It will be but for a moment. The hour is nearly come!"

To this cryptic utterance I returned no answer save a shrug, for I was thoroughly out of patience with him and his fool's errand. Never did I enter these walls, I told myself, but he had some such mare's nest to regale me with. He made a greater fuss over governing Montecchio than the Signoria made over ruling Florence; the time had come when I must read him such a lesson as would put an end, once for all, to his foolery.

However, for the time being I seated myself on the lowest step of the staircase and, though I had no idea that this mummery portended anything serious, peered about me from a soldier's instinct to learn how the land lay.

There was very little to see. The street was one in the poorer part of the town. It was lined with dark, low, half-ruined buildings, little more than huts, which doubtless sheltered the folk who made a scanty living out of my fields. Altogether, it seemed a remarkably unlikely place for any important secret to lurk, and when not only Roger's minute, but full five minutes or ten, had dragged by, I came to the conclusion that I had spent time enough in the humoring of even the oldest comrade.

"If you keep this vigil any longer, you will keep it alone!" I announced, getting to my feet. "For my part, I am going back to the castle like a sane man!"

On the last word I felt Thornbury's fingers seize my arm in a convulsive grasp, and simultaneously it was borne in upon me that the door just across the street was opening. I must say it gave me a bit of a thrill, the way that door swung out! It was too slow, too noiseless. It looked furtive—for if some honest man were inside, why in heaven's name did he not stumble into the street and be done with it?

The door swung wider. I caught a glimpse of a narrow little room, with earthen pots and the like scattered around it, and a fire winking at the farther end. Then the sight was blotted out, and by—of all things—a woman's figure.

What on earth did this mean, I asked myself? To be sure, it might be a harmless occurrence enough, but for all that I felt sufficient interest in the woman to stare hard at her as she stood in the moonlight.

Digitized by Google

She was a peasant; so much was plain from her dress of some coarse blue stuff and the gay-colored handkerchief on her head, though her thick black hair and keen eyes and strong-hard features might have belonged to any great lady of the virile sort that Italy breeds. She looked shrewd, and obviously had all her wits about her.

For a full moment she stood still, darting sharp glances to right and left. Then she stepped over the threshold, drew the door shut after her, and passing close beside us where we crouched in the dark, was off down the street as swiftly and noiselessly as a shadow.

"Aha, Sir John! What do you say now?" hissed Roger triumphantly, as she vanished.

IF I HAD thought that the pursuit would be easy, I was soon undeceived. Never in my life, before or since, have I tracked a quarry so wary, and had we not been two old soldiers used to reconnoitering, we would have been detected ignominiously within a hundred feet. The woman turned this way, that way; she halted just around corners; she paused to look behind her—a dozen times we slipped into a dark doorway or the shadow of a buttress with not a second to spare.

The chase led us twice around the town, doubling, turning, passing the castle, the little church of San Biagio, the arsenal; and frankly, by this time I was as absorbed in the affair as Roger himself could have wished, for having seen something of life I was by no means so guileless as to think that any one would take precautions like these for pure amusement.

Now the houses were growing fewer and more scattered, the oak-trees and chestnuts more numerous. We were heading straight for the eastern wall and the gate that faces the valley which stretches off toward Castiglione.

"Stop here, Sir John," breathed Roger, drawing me behind a great oak trunk.

And if you will believe it, hardly were we snugly settled in our new place of vantage when he chose this time, of all others, to exult over me.

"Ha, ha!" he whispered with the ghost of a cackle. "I am not such a fool after all, eh? At times I have my glimmers of reason, like another man?"

And by way of conclusion he sniggered to himself in a subdued fashion that made my fingers itch. There have been occasions when I have praised heaven for its mercy in giving me but a single old friend in Italy, and I can not deny that I offered up such a thanksgiving now.

Turning my back on him and peering out, I saw the one spot in Montecchio where the earth overtopped the walls—a steep little hill, covered with nettles and climbing vines. The woman climbed the slope, paused at the summit, and stood for a moment sharply outlined in the moonlight. Then she bent down and I caught the scraping of flint, followed by a brief flash.

"She lights a torch, Sir John!" breathed Roger in my ear.

Above us, the woman was raising her flaming torch over her head. Holding it at arm's length, she turned it in a circle, once, twice, three times. At the third revolution I heard Roger's chuckle end abruptly in a hoarse gasp. But I was no longer paying him the least heed, for the zest of the adventure had now taken full hold on me and I was watching the woman as if my life hung on her next act.

It appeared, however, that the play was ended. Even as I looked she dropped her hissing torch to earth, set her foot on it and ground out the flames. Then she came down the hill and went swiftly back toward the village, walking with the air of one whose work is well done.

II

BEING by this time a good deal excited over the night's doings, I was annoyed to find, when we had regained the castle, that Roger had very little more to divulge. All he could tell me was that this woman had appeared in Montecchio some two weeks earlier, poorly dressed and carrying a bag of copper coins, and had asked leave to rent a hut inside the walls and a plot of land without. As to her own affairs she was close-mouthed, saying only that she had lived in the Chiana valley, had lost her husband by a fever, and now, being alone, wanted to live in the shelter of a walled town. It was a likely enough story and had aroused no suspicion.

Since then she had lived a life that jibed perfectly with her account of herself, mixing seldom with her neighbors and working

Digitized by Google

hard in her field outside the walls. Whatever her aim, she had been in a fair way to succeed when, as luck would have it, Roger one night rode home late from a day afield, caught the flash of her torch on the hill, and by hiding there next night had touched the hem of the mystery. With all my heart I wished he had accomplished a trifle more, but he gave me small chance to say so. That third revolution of the torch, had, for some reason, plunged him into a state of absolute terror, and after giving me the facts of the case he seemed to lose all sanity.

"I tell you, Sir John," he raved, "there is some plot against you! She signals to Castiglione, this woman; that is as plain as day. Always before she has waved her torch but twice, and tonight she waved it three times. What can the change mean, save the news that you have come to Montecchio?

"Ah, what madness, your visit! Siena, Castiglione and the rest are mad with hate of you because you ride to make peace terms against them. Do you think they would not rejoice to have your life on the journey? And then, her face—so hard, so resolute! It comes into my dreams! As I am a living man, Sir John, I believe that if ever you enter Florence again, it will be on your bier!"

At this point I cut his encouraging predictions short, for I was beginning to feel that if I heard many more of them, I would turn as crazy as he.

"Have the woman here in the castle hall at noon tomorrow," I said. "I will have speech with her and get at the truth of the affair in short order. Now, as it appears I might as well hope for peace in Siena itself as in this castle, I am going to bed!"

And to bed I went in spite of his protests.

IT WAS my custom when at Montecchio to give myself more sleep than I was lucky enough to get as a common thing, and to lie abed till noon. I had promised myself such a holiday on this occasion too, so I was anything but pleased, as you may imagine, to be aroused at dawn by sounds in the courtyard under my window—the whistling of a lash in the air, and the groans of some wretch unfortunate enough to be receiving its weight on his back.

Evidently Roger was evening scores with a sentry who had dozed at his post, or some such delinquent, and while I wished him joy of his task it struck me that he might have done me the favor to perform the ceremony at a rather more distant spot. My plan for enjoying a brief interval of rest and peace had undeniably proved a complete failure, and as I turned on my couch I determined to make no further effort at seeking blessings which plainly were not for me.

The worst of the affair was, however, yet in store. When at a little after noon I descended to the castle hall, in fairly good spirits at the prospect of matching wits with my mysterious tenant, I found the place occupied only by Roger who at sound of my step looked up at me with such a face of anguish as must have moved a heart of stone.

"Sir John, Sir John! She is gone, that woman!" was his greeting.

Here was pleasant news indeed. Staring at him blankly, I sank into a chair and he gave me the rest of his tidings in a sort of desperate outburst.

"Aye, gone!" he moaned. "And what is more, she went last night, straight from the hill, the moment her work was done! At nine of the clock she was at the east gate, telling the sentry some tale of having left her tools in the field and wanting to fetch them lest they should be stolen overnight. He believed her, the fool! He let her pass out, in spite of the law that closes the gates at sunset, and she has not come back."

"Ah!" I commented, remembering the sounds that had broken my rest. "And you have had a word with this clever sentry, eh?"

Roger nodded.

"Another time he will know better than to let spies go skirmishing in and out of Montecchio at their pleasure, I think!" he said grimly, and then relapsed into his former despair. "But when all is said," he groaned with tears in his eyes, "if justice were done, it is my own back should suffer! Of all fools in the world, surely I am the greatest, that I did not send last night to seize her!

"Oh, I make a botch of all I touch; I love you more than any man on earth, and behold how I serve you! I know well, Sir John, you could never bear with me save for old time's sake. It is plain I lack wits

Digitized by Google

to be a simple soldier, let alone a castellan!"

For an instant, in my exasperation, I felt inclined to say that I agreed with him, for when on the previous night I had told him that I wanted speech with the woman, I had certainly credited him with sense enough to send at once to secure her. But his despair was so obvious that it roused all my old kindness for him, and, concealing my irritation with an effort, I put an encouraging hand on his shoulder.

"It matters nothing, Roger," I said with an assurance I was far from feeling. "Never fret over it. The saints know we all cut a foolish figure now and again."

He fixed imploring eyes on me.

"In the name of Heaven, Sir John," he cried, "do me one grace! Not a moment's peace shall I have till you are safe in Florence. Ride at once, then, and never draw rein till you are there."

To tell the truth, though I affected to laugh at his speech, I was not sure that it was not the most sensible counsel I had ever heard him utter.

"Well, you have no need to put yourself in a flurry about that," said I, "for I had intended departing at noon, and had bidden my troopers be ready. Come, pluck up spirit. You and I will laugh over this business when I stop here next month!"

And hastily draining a cup of wine, I strode out of the hall and into the castle courtyard.

THE sight that met my eyes was an extraordinary one. Instead of awaiting me in proper order, sitting motionless in their saddles, my troopers had left their horses near the gate and were gathered together in the center of the court, whispering with their heads close.

It was plain that something out of the odinary had happened to disturb them, for as they turned at sound of my step I saw that one and all of them looked pale and shaken, and that their eyes held such a look of anxiety as I had never known the prospect of the bloodiest battle to bring there. But at present I was less concerned with their emotions than with the amount of respect they were deigning to show me.

"Well, what does this mean, pray?" I asked sharply, as I strode forward. "Am I the Captain-General of Florence, or some rogue of a trooper like yourselves, that you laze about my court without a by-your-leave?"

Though they gave back from me at my question, it was evident they had some excuse which they thought more or less serviceable, for they promptly began to nudge their leader. After an instant that worthy, a fellow named Andrea, advanced a step.

"Your pardon, Sir John," he stammered, "but this accursed tale has robbed us all of our wits."

"What tale?" I demanded. "It should be something alarming indeed, to make your legs shake like two straws."

He moistened dry lips before proceeding.

"Your pardon again for the question, my General," he began, "but was it not your will to ride to Florence by the highroad, passing through Montevaroni?"

"It was," I answered grimly. "Are you going to tell me that you prefer another route?"

A little choking gasp ran about among my troopers, and as for their spokesman, he turned whiter yet, if that could be.

"Sir John," he cried, "if we go that way, we are all dead men! The Black Death is traveling eastward from Siena. The countryside is rife with it, and the rumor runs that Montevaroni is already doomed!"

Here indeed was a pretty imbroglio. On the spot I granted my troop a mental absolution for their scared faces; for the Black Death is, with good reason, the terror of Italy, and I fancy there lives no soldier who would not rather take his chances with twenty swordsmen than with this horrible sickness. To ride through the infested country was impossible, yet we must win through somehow to Florence, and in short order too. Undeniably my visit to Montecchio had been ill-starred. From the moment I had entered the gates, nothing had chanced but a series of disasters.

"Where did you get this news?" I asked shortly, in the end.

As is usual in such cases, no one could oblige me with a clear answer. Each man referred me to a different source, and even Andrea, the most intelligent of the party, could only tell me that the story had been whispered about the town on the previous night, and with the coming of morning had run riot.

For a moment there was silence. Then, as I stood scowling and racking my brains

Digitized by Google

for a way out of the difficulty, Andrea ventured to make a suggestion.

"There is the by-path through the Chiana Valley, Sir John," said he, "the path that leads by the Stone Ford. If you would be pleased to go that way, we could sleep below Vallombrosa and reach Florence tomorrow. And here is Gilberto who knows the route."

"As well as my pocket, Sir John. I have traveled it a hundred times," volunteered Gilberto himself.

WELL, if this was what they had been mustering up courage to ask of me I was ready enough to oblige them, for while I flattered myself that it was not in my nature to grow pasty-faced and weak-kneed at sight of danger, still I was not much fonder of the Black Death than they were.

"In Heaven's name, then, let us be about it!" I cried and got hastily to horse.

But I was not done with Montecchio yet. As I settled into my saddle I chanced to glance back over my shoulder, and there, riding at the very end of my line of troopers, with his face half hidden and a bearing so unostentatious that it might well-nigh have been described as slinking, whom should I see but Roger Thornbury!

"The saints pity us!" I exclaimed, drawing rein to stare at him. "What new foolery is this?"

Seeing himself discovered, he pushed his hat off his eyes and faced me sulkily.

"Well," he growled, "and did you think I meant to let you go without me, to meet who knows what danger? Not I, Sir John! I mean to ride with you to Florence and see for myself that you run no risks you need not run!"

At this announcement I distinctly heard Andrea chuckle, though when I wheeled on him with a glare he skilfully turned his ill-timed mirth into a violent fit of coughing; and I must confess I did not greatly blame him, for the idea of John Hawkwood junketing over Italy in charge of a species of duenna, who should decide what risks were to be taken and which avoided, was enough to make a graven image smile. If any such story got abroad, I would never hear the last of it, and many as were the allowances I was prepared to make for the sake of an ancient friendship, I felt that this was the last straw.

"Roger, you old fool," I said sternly, "off of that horse with you and back into the castle! You will not ride to Florence; you will stop here and watch my holdings. Not a word more will I hear, do you understand? Now good-by to you, and may you practise more sense against my return!"

Obstinate as he was, he had wit to know when he had gone far enough. With a noisy sigh of resignation he wheeled his horse aside and sat dejectedly watching us depart.

"You ride off very gaily, Sir John!" he gloomed, evidently hoping to the last that I might be moved to relent. "Heaven grant you may not change your tune before you see the Arno! In your place I would not be so scornful of a comrade's aid—for mark my words, you have not seen the last of her yet—that woman whom we tracked last night!"

With this cheerful prophecy still ringing in my ears I rode out of Montecchio.

III

IT WAS near dusk when our little *cortège* wound through the Chiana Valley and approached the Ford, and as the river came in sight I for one felt inclined to offer up thanks, for, truth to tell, the journey had proved anything but agreeable. Though my troopers had set out in fairly good spirits at avoiding Montevaroni and the Black Death, this self-congratulation had not endured long. Before we had ridden a mile their fears were stirring again, reminding them how near was the terrible sickness, and turning them little by little into as pitiful a set of figures, for seasoned soldiers, as ever I saw.

A little thing might have put them in an uncontrollable panic, and while I knew better than to encourage them by taking the least notice of their terror, I dared not let them exchange ideas either. So I announced that until we were safely out of the hostile country not a tongue in the troop was to wag, and we jogged along in sepulchral silence, like a train of mourners.

All things considered, I could not find it in my heart to blame the poor wretches overmuch, for the road we were traveling was not an enlivening one, and I soon registered a vow that my first experience of it should also be my last. Our path, a mere thread, wound through a veritable maze of fever-swamps.

Digitized by Google

I suppose it occurred to every one present, as it did to me, that even Montevaroni could not have been much worse than this poisonous air, full of evil vapors and reeking with deadly midsummer heat. The leafless trees to right and left of us looked unpleasantly like specters; and as for our horses, during most of the trip they were knee deep in the soft marshy bogs.

Whether or no it was the scenery that worked on me I can not say, but my spirits fell lower and lower, and though I do not commonly yield to foolish fancies I began to feel as if some catastrophe were hanging over us. Roger's final words, to which I had paid scant heed as he uttered them, now beat themselves in my brain like witch's music, and despite all my efforts to think of other matters, I found myself forever harking back to the affair of the previous night.

It had been a strange business, no doubt about that, for when all is said and done a woman does not commonly pop out of a hut, circle a town three times, signal from the walls, and vanish from the place she has chosen as a home, all within an hour. And then, her face—strong, hard, resolute! She had been working for some definite purpose, and though I had not an idea what it was, I felt uneasily convinced that she was like to succeed.

It appeared, however, that my fears were unwarranted, for we pursued our journey without encountering a soul, friendly or otherwise, and toward dusk approached the river without even so trivial a misadventure as a broken girth or lamed horse. At sight of the water my spirits went up with such a bound that not even the landscape, now more depressing than ever—the thunderous yellow clouds in the west and the sickly mist in the air were creating an effect no less than grisly—could dampen them by a jot; for once across, we would be on Florentine soil, with nothing to fear from either foes or plague. My troopers knew this full as well as I did, as their lightening faces showed, and it was with a very respectable pretense at good cheer that we followed Gilberto, at a gallop, to the river's brink.

"BUT how does this happen, eh?" I demanded in surprise, as we halted. "You talked of bringing me to a ford, and certainly I see none hereabouts!"

"Oh, that will be because of the storms we had last week, Sir John," Gilberto explained readily. "The water is running high, you perceive, and since the ford is but a rude one of stones, it is hidden. I know the spot well. Do but enter here, in a line with the great charred oak."

So assured was his tone that I never dreamed of doubting him. Urging my horse forward, I splashed into the water at the precise spot he indicated—and came as near meeting my death as ever I did yet.

Stone ford in that river there was none. In less time than it takes to tell it I was up to my neck in ice-cold water, and under me my terrified horse was battling wildly with the fierce Chiana current, which was doing its best to sweep us off to perdition. You can picture for yourself, if you choose, the minutes that followed. Though they did not last long, they were lively while they did endure, and it gives me no pleasure to recall them even now; so suffice it to say that in the end I somehow won back to shore, and, dripping from head to foot, stood again among my petrified troopers.

"Saints of mercy!" cried Gilberto at last, with eyes as round as plates. "The stones are gone!"

A cold bath of the sort I had just enjoyed is not a soothing experience. My intention was that some one should pay for it, and here undoubtedly was the proper person. Striding up to him, I caught him by the back of the neck.

"Gone, you villain!" I cried in a rage. "They were never here! You have offered to guide me to a place of which you know no more than a babe unborn. But I will teach you to crack jests at my expense!"

Before my arm could descend, however, Andrea took the word.

"But, Sir John, it is true, what Gilberto says!" he exclaimed, staring wide-eyed at the river. "I also have ridden this way, though less often than he, and I can swear that the ford was at that very spot!"

Now I was well aware that Gilberto was as arrant a liar as walked the earth, and no protestation of his would have had a feather's weight with me. But Andrea, to the best of my knowledge, had never deceived me yet, nor was there any reason why he should try to do so now. Moreover, at this instant another trooper volunteered the information that he too had

Digitized by Google

once made the journey, and recalled distinctly that the stones had been, as Gilberto asserted, in a line with the burned tree.

"By your leave, Sir John, some one has destroyed the ford!" was his solution of the puzzle.

THE words gave me a colder chill than had the water. For a moment I stood staring at the man who had uttered them. Then, all dripping as I was, I strode over to a fallen tree-trunk, seated myself upon it, and, propping my elbows on my knees, began to think. My wits, which had apparently been wool-gathering during the greater part of the last four and twenty hours, now returned to me in full force, and I saw a good many things which I might well have glimpsed earlier.

Suppose, I reasoned, that Roger had been right. Suppose the conquered cities, whose fate I was on my way to settle at Florence, had determined to get rid of me by foul means in the course of my journey. What would their first step be? Divining that I would doubtless halt at Montecchio, they would despatch there some shrewd emissary like my mysterious woman, who would signal them in a certain fashion on the nights when the town went unhonored by my presence, in another fashion on the night when I arrived. She had flashed the news to them with her torch the previous evening; and I fancied that a troop of men had instantly left Castiglione on a night jaunt to the Chiana Ford, and that by dawn every vestige of the stones had been hewn away.

I could find but one missing link in the chain—the fact that unless the tale of the plague had reached Montecchio in the very nick of time, a circumstance they could not possibly have foreseen, I would never on earth have traveled by the lonely river-path instead of by the highroad. After puzzling over this for a little, I began to have a shrewd suspicion that the Black Death was not raging in Montevaroni at all. It was more than likely that the whole story was a lying rumor, set afloat last night by the woman of the torch, and palmed off by her on the folk of Montecchio as a true tale from a trustworthy source.

Well, if that were the case, the trap had been prettily baited, and I had fallen into it with a readiness that must have proved gratifying to my foes. Surely I had proved myself the king of fools, and so I admitted between teeth that still chattered from my impromptu bath.

And finally, what had been the end and aim of so much plotting? Again I reflected; and since I knew that to try to swim the strong currents of the river in the dusk would probably mean death, and there was no habitation within miles of me on this side of the water, I thought it fairly plain that my foes had been working for the purpose of forcing me to spend the night where I was. But why, then? There seemed to be but one answer. No doubt they intended to set a band of cutthroats upon me in this lonely spot, and to make an end of both me and my troopers.

With this pleasant thought for company, I began to study the ghastly yellowish landscape, which I must say looked as appropriate a spot for a murder as fancy could paint. There was no living soul in sight, but that fact reassured me very little since the attack would be all the more deadly if made later, under cover of darkness.

Of course, the sole thing to do was, as any soldier worth his salt will guess, to find some place in which to barricade ourselves; and scarcely had I begun to look about when I saw, not two hundred feet away on the crest of a hill, a small half-ruined hut which struck me as a very promising spot for the purpose.

I GOT to my feet briskly.

"My friends," said I to the gaping circle about me, "it is my belief that we have been decoyed here for a purpose, and that we will be attacked before morning. Well, since to go forward is impossible and to go back is to court an ambush, we will stop where we are.

"Do you see the hut yonder? Let us go quarter ourselves in it, kindle a fire, and sup on what food we have in our pouches. After that we will take turns at watching out the night—and if there is killing to be done, at least we will do what we can to give as good as we get!"

One tribute I must, in common honesty, pay these fellows of mine—if they were afraid of the Black Death, they were not afraid of cold steel. Indeed, the prospect of facing a flesh-and-blood enemy seemed to have a steadying effect on their nerves,

Digitized by Google

and it was with perfect good temper that they followed me as I got to horse and started up the hill. The ascent was steep and the dusk was rapidly deepening, so we had need to go with care; and we were no more than half-way to the top when Andrea touched my arm.

"Look yonder, Sir John! Who is coming?" he muttered under his breath.

For an instant I thought, and so I will warrant did the others, that our foes were upon us, but a brief use of my eyes acquainted me with the reassuring fact that it was but a single horseman who approached. Moreover, he was not coming in any stealthy fashion. He was spurring frantically, shouting to us inarticulately at the top of his voice, and waving his arms like a madman.

"Saints, Sir John!" cried Gilberto, with a sort of wild snigger. "It is Messer Roger Thornbury!"

And so, of all men, it was. He reached the river, wheeled his horse and dashed up the hill; fell, rather than clambered, to earth; dropped in a nerveless heap on the ground in front of me; and finally, even in his exhaustion, found strength to beat the air madly with his arms, as if warning me back.

"Not that hut, Sir John! Not that hut!" he gasped with all the force he could muster.

The man was near a swoon. Seeing it, I took my flask from my saddle-bag and poured its contents, none too gently, down his throat, after which I pulled him unceremoniously to his feet.

"Now then, my friend," I said grimly, "we will hear what this means, if you please! Do you dare tell me that you followed me here after the commands I gave you?"

Roger had by now recovered his breath, and with it his assurance.

"Aye, I did!" he said defiantly. "I thought, Sir John, that what you did not know would not hurt you! And you would never have known of my presence five hundred feet behind you, had I not needed to appear to save your life——"

"My life? I have not seen you save it yet!" I retorted with small gratitude.

Roger struck an attitude and swelled visibly with importance.

"You think so?" he exulted. "Then listen, Sir John! I fancy you have not traveled this way before, eh? And perhaps none of your troopers have passed here within a twelve-month? Then you are all ignorant who dwelt lately in that little hut you were approaching so gaily?

"But I know! It was the home of two wretched peasants who begged alms of such few folk as used this river-road; and three months since they had guests overnight—a poor peasant family fleeing from Siena and the plague.

"But as it chanced, these guests had not fled quite soon enough. Unknown to themselves, they brought the Black Death with them. They died in that hut, and their hosts died too! And if you had slept within those walls, Sir John, mark me well, not all the doctors in Italy could have saved your life!"

If he wanted his revenge, he had it. For a long minute there was no sound save the sharp, hoarse breathing of my men. Their faces showed through the dusk as white as paper, and I do not doubt that I looked a bit shaken myself, for it seemed to me that, as the saying has it, some one was walking over my grave.

Now at last I knew why I had been stranded hereabouts for the night, with no visible shelter save the little hut. To have killed the Florentine Captain-General by cut-throats' daggers would have been plain murder, and might have brought terrible vengeance from the Republic; but since the broken ford, the sole piece of proof of the black affair, might be rebuilt tomorrow, who could be blamed if I were carried off by the plague?

Yes, but for Roger's timely advent I would have died, not as soldiers die, but horribly, as men go when the Black Death takes them. Ah, of all the schemes that had been woven around me in my life, surely there had been none so shrewd, so certain, so devilish as this.

To pull myself together was something of a task, but I did it and turned my back with a shudder on that grisly hut.

"Well, my good friends," I remarked to my men, "I think you will agree with me that even if we must ride until midnight before reaching our beds, it will be more pleasant to sleep at Montecchio than here. Let us be off, then.

"As for you, Roger, you are a jewel of a castellan, and I will grant you anything on earth that lies in my power, save only my

Digitized by Google

leave to trail me in secret, which is an experiment you had better not try twice. And since you have proved yourself so clever, I wish you might do me one more favor. It is a thousand pities you can not tell me the name of the woman whom I have to thank for this cheerful jaunt!"

"As to that, Sir John," said Roger, with a shudder, "you are like never to learn it, for I think she was some fiend from below!"

FOR my part, I looked on this idea with some skepticism, being of the opinion that she was as mortal as Roger or myself, though perhaps rather more dangerous than either of us; but I had little more hope than he of arriving at the truth of the matter. However, time, which clears up a good many mysteries, was fated to solve this one too.

A month after my experience in the Chiana Valley I returned from Florence with my peace terms and halted at Castiglione to let the Podesta of that place know what he must do if he did not want to see his city in ruins. Being perfectly aware that I had the whip-hand of him, he made the best of the matter. He welcomed me with a splendid banquet. Just before the beginning of this festivity he came to me where I stood talking with his officers and my own, in the center of his castle hall.

"By your leave, Sir John," said he, "I will now present you to my lady, whom doubtless you know already by report."

To be sure I had heard often enough of Madonna Donnina. Indeed, though I did not tell him as much, I had heard things of her that would have made her lord scowl could he have listened to them, since the common rumor was that without her to aid him he would never have climbed where he now stood. It was her brain that planned for him, men said, her wit that guided him. She had a soldier's heart, and once in his absence had held the city against a besieging army.

"Her acquaintance will honor me, my lord," I said.

Together we crossed the hall and paused before his lady. She was very proud, very splendid; she was dressed in silks and glittered with jewels. I looked at her; and on the instant the gay scene about us seemed to vanish. I was back in a dark street, looking at a low, mean hut, an open door; and, on the threshold in the moonlight, a woman in a coarse blue dress, with a peasant's handkerchief on her black hair!

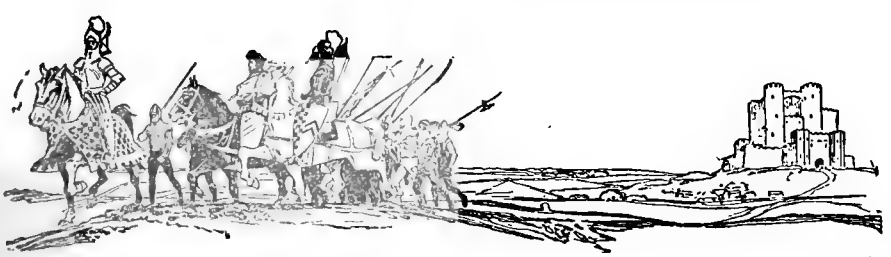
"There is no need that you should present me to your wife, my lord!" I announced. "We are old friends, she and I. A full month ago we met in my town of Montecchio!"

The Podesta fell back with a low gasp. As for me, my vision had changed. Now I was looking at a yellowish landscape, a river, and a tiny desolate hut perched on a hill. All the horror of that night swept back on me, and I was opening my lips to say something very much to the purpose when a look at the woman halted me.

She was pale as death. She was staring at me in speechless terror—the Podesta's wife, mark you, who was said to have never known fear! The triumph was sufficient, and since a man does not deal with women as he deals with men, I determined to be content with the revenge my dramatic remark had brought me.

"Madonna Donnina," said I, saluting her airily, "I have lived through such perils as you would never believe, I have escaped such clever plots as you would scarce credit, only for the pleasure of this minute!"

Then I bent above the fingers which had held the torch to signal for my death; and we all went to supper. But both the Podesta and his lady made a very poor meal.



Digitized by Google

THE WINDS OF THE WORLD

A THREE-PART STORY—PART I

By Talbot Mundy

Author of "Hookum Hai," "The Soul of a Regiment," "Gulbaz and the Game," etc.

Ever the Winds of the World fare forth,
(Oh listen ye! So, listen ye!)
East and West, and South and North,
Swift shuttles weaving back and forth
Amid the warp! (Oh, listen ye!)
Can sightless touch—can vision keen
Go search where the Winds of the World have been
And learn from the source what rumors mean?
(Nay, ye who are wise! Nay, listen ye!)
When tracks are crossed and the scent is stale,
'Tis fools who shout and the fast who fail,
While the wise men harken— (Listen ye!)
Yasmini's Song.

A WATERY July sun was hurrying toward a Punjab skyline, as if weary of squandering his strength on men who did not mind, and resentful of the unexplainable—a rainy-weather field-day. The cold steel and khaki of native Indian cavalry at attention gleamed motionless between British infantry and two batteries of horse artillery; but the only noticeable sound was the voice of a general officer, that rose and fell explaining and asserting pride in his command, but saying nothing as to the why of exercises in the mud. Nor did he mention why the censorship was in full force. He did not say a word of Germany, or of Belgium.

In front of the third squadron from the right, Subahdar-major Ranjoor Singh sat his charger like a big bronze statue. He would have stooped to see his right spur better, that shone in spite of mud, had his charger been less possessed of the fires of hell; for though he has been a man these five-and-twenty years, Ranjoor Singh has neither lost his boyhood love of such things, nor means to; he has been accused of wearing solid silver spurs in bed. But it hurt him to bend much, after a day's hard exercises on a horse such as he rode, for there was an Afghan bullet underneath his ribs.

Once—in a rock-strewn gully where the whistling Himalayan wind was Acting Antiseptic-of-the-Day—a young surgeon had taken hurried stitches over Ranjoor Singh's ribs without probing deep enough for an Afghan bullet; that bullet burned after a long day in the saddle. And Bagh—as the big brute's name implied—was a tiger of a horse, unweakened even by Monsoon weather, whose habit was to spring with terrific suddenness when his rider moved on him.

So Ranjoor Singh sat still, well willing to eat agony at any time for the squadron's sake—for a squadron of Outram's Own is a unity to marvel at, or envy, and its leader a man to be forgiven spurs a half-inch longer than the regulation—but as a soldier careful of himself when occasion offered.

Sikh-soldier-wise, he preferred Bagh *to* all other horses in the world, because it had needed persuasion, much stroking of a black beard, to hide anxiety, many a secret night-ride, to sweat the brute's savagery, before the Colonel-sahib could be made to see his

Digitized by Google

virtues as a charger and accept him into the regiment. Sikh-wise, he loved all things that expressed in any way his own unconquerable fire, though most of all he loved the squadron. There was no woman, nor anything between him and Squadron D, but Bagh came next.

Spurs were not needed when the General ceased speaking, and the British Colonel of Outram's Own shouted an order. Bagh, brute energy, beneath hand-polished hair and plastered dirt, sprang like a loosed hell-tantrum, and his rider's lips drew tight over clenched teeth as he mastered self, agony and horse in one man's effort. Fight how he would, heel, tooth and eye all flashing, Bagh was forced to hold his rightful place in front of Squadron D, precisely the right distance behind the last supernumerary of the squadron next in front.

Line after rippling line, all Sikhs of the true Sikh baptism except for the eight of their officers who were European, Outram's Own swept down a living avenue of British troops; and neither gunners nor infantry could see one flaw in them, although picking flaws in native regiments is almost part of the British army officer's religion.

To the blare of military music, through a bog of their own mixing, the Sikhs trotted for a mile, then drew into a walk, to bring the horses into barracks cool enough for watering.

They reached stables as the sun dipped under the near-by acacia trees, and while the black-bearded troopers scraped and rubbed the mud from weary horses, Ranjoor Singh went through a task whose form at least was part of his very life. He could imagine nothing less than death or active service that could keep him from inspecting every horse in the squadron before he ate or drank, or as much as washed himself.

But, although the day had been a hard one and the strain on the horses more than ordinary, his examination now was so perfunctory that the squadron gaped; the troopers signaled to one another with their eyes behind his back as he passed down the lines in a hurry, little more than glancing at each horse. Almost before his back had vanished at the stable entrance, wonderment burst into words.

"For the third time he does thus!"

"See! My beast overreached, and he passed without detecting it! Does the sun set the same way still?"

"I have noticed that he does thus each time after a field day. What is the connection? A field day in the rains—a general officer talking to us afterwards about the Salt, as if a Sikh does not understand the Salt better than a British General knows English—and our subahdar-major neglecting the horses! Is there a connection?"

"Aye. What is all this? We worked no harder in the war against the Chitralis. There is something in my bones that speaks of war, when I listen for a while!"

"War! Hear him, brothers! Talk is talk, but there will be no war until India grows too fat to breathe—unless the past be remembered and we make one for ourselves!"

THERE was silence for a while, if a change of sounds is silence. The Delhi mud sticks as tight as any, and the kneading of it from out of horse-hair taxes most of a trooper's energy and full attention. Then, the East being the East in all things, a solitary trooper picked up the scent and gave tongue, as a true hound guides the pack.

"Who is *she?*" he wondered, loud enough for fifty men to hear.

From out of a cloud of horse-dust, where a stable helper on probation combed a tangled tail, came one word of swift enlightenment.

"Yasmini!"

"Ah-h-h-h!"

In a second the whole squadron was by the ears, and the stable-helper was the center of an interest he had not bargained for.

"Nay, sahibs, I but followed him, and how should I know? Nay, then I did not follow him! It so happened. I took that road, and he stepped out of a *tikka-gharri* at her door. Am I blind? Do I not know her door? Does not everybody know it? Who am I that I should know why he goes again? But—does a moth fly only once to the lamp-flame? Does a drunkard drink but once? By the Guru, nay! May my tongue parch in my throat if I said he is a drunkard! I said—I meant to say—seeing she is Yasmini, and he having been to see her once—and being again in a great hurry—whither goes he?"

So the squadron chose a sub-committee of inquiry, seven strong, that being a lucky number the wide world over; and the movements of the subahdar-major were reported one by one to the squadron with the infinite

Digitized by Google

exactness of small detail that seems so useless to all except Easterns.

Fifteen minutes after he had left his quarters, no longer in khaki uniform but dressed as a Sikh gentleman, the whole squadron knew the color of his undershirt as well as that he had hired a *tikka-gharri*, and that his only weapon was the ornamental dagger that a true Sikh wears twisted in his hair. One after one, five other men reported him nearly all the way through Delhi—through the Chandni Chowk, where the last man but one nearly lost him in the evening crowd—to the winding street in the middle of which, with a bend in the street to either hand, is Yasmini's.

The last man watched him through Yasmini's outer door and up the lower stairs before hurrying back to the squadron. And a little later on, being almost as inquisitive as they were careful for their major, the squadron delegated other men, in *mufti*, to watch for him at the foot of Yasmini's stairs, or as near to the foot as might be, and see him safely home again if they had to fight all Asia on the way.

These men had some money with them, and weapons hidden underneath their clothes; for, having betted largely on the quail-fight at Abdul's stables, the squadron was in funds.

"In case of trouble one can bribe the police," counseled Nanak Singh, and he surely ought to know for he was the oldest trooper, and trouble everlasting had preserved him from promotion. "But weapons are good, when policemen are not looking," he added, and the squadron agreed with him.

It was Tej Singh, not given to talking as a rule, who voiced the general opinion.

"Now we are on the track of things. Now, perhaps, we shall know the meaning of field exercises during the Monsoon, with our horses up to the belly in blue mud! The winds of all the world blow into Yasmini's and out again. Our subahdar-major knows nothing at all of women—and that is the danger. But he can listen to the wind; and what he hears, sooner or later we shall know, too. I smell happenings!"

Those three words comprised the whole of it. The squadron spent most of the night whispering, dissecting, analyzing, subdividing, weighing, guessing at that smell of happenings, while its subahdar-major, thinking his secret all his own, investigated nearer to its source.

CHAPTER II

The West wind blows through the Ajmere Gate
And whispers low (Oh, listen ye!),
"The fed wolf curls by his drowsy mate
In a tight-trod earth; but the lean wolves wait,
And the hunger gnaws!" (Oh, listen ye!)
"Can fed wolves fight? But yestere'en
Their eyes were bright, their fangs were clean;
They viewed, they took but yestere'en,"
(Oh, listen, wise-heads, listen ye!)
"Because they fed, is blood less red,
Or fangs less sharp, or hunger dead?"
(Look well to the loot, and listen ye!)

Yasmini's Song.

YASMINI bears a reputation that includes her gift for dancing and her skill in song, but that is not bounded thereby. Her stairs illustrate it—the steep, winding stairs that lead to her bewildering reception-floor, two flights above; they seem to have been designed to take men's breaths away, and to deliver them at the top defenseless.

But Subahdar-major Ranjoor Singh mounted them with scarcely an effort, as a man who could master Bagh well might, and at the top his middle-aged back was straight and his eye clear. The cunning, curtained lights did not distract him; so he did not make the usual mistake of thinking that the Loveliness who met him was Yasmini.

Yasmini likes to make her first impression of the evening on a man just as he comes from making an idiot of himself; so the maid who curtsies in the stair-head maze of mirrored lights has been trained to imitate her. But Ranjoor Singh flipped the girl a coin, and it jingled at her feet.

The maid ceased bowing, too insulted to retort. The piece of silver—she would have stooped for gold, just as surely as she would have recognized its ring—lay where it fell. Ranjoor Singh stepped forward toward a glass-bead curtain through which a soft light shone, and an unexpected, low laugh greeted him. It was merry, mocking, musical—and something more; there was wisdom hidden in it, masquerading as frivolity; somewhere, too, there was villainy that she who laughed knew all about and found more interesting than a play.

Then suddenly the curtain parted, and Yasmini blocked the way, standing with arms spread wide to either door-post, smiling at him, and Ranjoor Singh had to stop and stare whether it suited him or not.

Yasmini is not old, nor nearly old, for all that India is full of tales about her, from the

Digitized by Google

Himalayas to Cape Cormorin. In a land where twelve is a marriagable age a woman need not live to thirty to be talked about; and if she can dance as Yasmini does—though only the Russian ballet can do that—she has the secret of perpetual youth to help her defy the years. No doubt the soft light favored her, but she might have been Ranjoor Singh's granddaughter as she barred his way and looked him up and down impudently through languorous brown eyes.

"Salaam, O ploughman!" she mocked. She was not actually still an instant, for the light played incessantly on her gauzy silken trousers and jeweled slippers, but she made no move to admit him. "My honor grows! Twice—nay, three times in a little while!"

She spoke in the Jat tongue fluently; but that was not remarkable, because Yasmini is mistress of so many languages that men say one can not speak in her hearing and not be understood.

"I am a soldier," answered Ranjoor Singh more than a little stiffly.

"'I am a statesman,' said the Viceroy's babu! A Sikh is a Jat farmer with his name changed, and with the manners of a buffalo! Age or gallantry will bend a man's back. What keeps it straight—the smell of the farmyard on his shoes?"

Ranjoor Singh did not answer her, nor did he bow low as she intended. She forgot perhaps that on a previous occasion he had seen her snatch a man's turban from his head and run with it into the room, to the man's sweating shame. He kicked his shoes off calmly and waited as a man waits on parade, looking straight into her eyes that were like dark jewels, only no jewels in the world ever glowed so wonderfully; he thought he could read anger in them, but that ruffled him no more than her mockery.

"Enter, then, O farmer!" she said, turning lithely as a snake, to beckon him and lead the way.

Now he had only a back view of her, but the contour of her neck and chin and her shoulders mocked him just as surely as her lips were making signals that he could not see. One answer to the signals was the tittering of twenty maids, who sat together by the great deep window, ready to make music.

"They laugh to see a farmer strayed from his manure-pile!" purred Yasmini over her shoulder; but Ranjoor Singh followed her unperturbed.

He was finding time to study the long room and its divans and deep cushions around the walls, and it did not escape his notice that many people were expected. He guessed there was room for thirty or forty to sit at ease.

Like a pale-blue will-o'-the-wisp, a-glitter in the cunning lights, she led him to a far end of the room where many cushions were. Then she turned on him with a snake-like suddenness that was one of her surest tricks.

"I shall have great guests tonight—I shall be busy," she asserted.

"That is thy affair," said Ranjoor Singh, quite well aware that her eyes were watching his as if the twin searchlights of the underworld would read his soul. The drooped eyelids did not deceive him.

"Then, what do you want here?"

The question was sheer impudence. It is very well understood in Delhi that any native gentleman of rank may call on Yasmini between midday and midnight without offering a reason for his visit; otherwise it would be impossible to hold a salon and be a power in politics, in a land where politics run deep, but where men do not admit openly to which party they belong. But Yasmini represents the spirit of the Old East, sweeter than a rose and twice as tempting—with a poisoned thorn inside. And here was the New East, in the shape of a middle-aged Sikh officer, taught by Young England. He annoyed her.

RANJOOR SINGH'S answer was to seat himself, with a dignity the West has yet to learn, on a long divan that rested against the wall and from which he had a good view of the entrance as well as of all the rest of the room, window included. Instantly she flung herself on the other end of it, and lay face downward with her chin resting on both hands to study him.

She studied his face intently for sixty seconds, and it very seldom takes her that long to read a man's character, guess at his past and make arrangements for his future, if she thinks him worth her while.

"Why are you here?" she asked again at the end of it.

But Ranjoor Singh seemed not to hear her; he was watching other men who entered, and listening to the sound of yet others on the stairs. He saw no other Sikh enter, nor more than one of any other caste

Digitized by Google

or tribe, yet he counted thirty men in half as many minutes.

"I think you are a buffalo!" she said at last; but if Ranjoor Singh was interested in her thoughts he forgot to admit it.

A dozen more men came in, and the already heavy air grew thick with tobacco smoke that mingled with the smoke of sandalwood and floated back and forth in layers as the *punkahs* swung lazily. Outside, the rain swished in tropic savagery, chilling the night air; but the hot air from inside hurried out to meet the cool, and none of the cool came in. The noise of rain became depressing until Yasmini made a signal to her maids and they started to make music.

Then Yasmini caught a new sound on the stairs, and swiftly, instantly, instead of glancing to the entrance her eyes sought Ranjoor Singh's; and she saw that he had heard it too. So, she sat up as if enlightenment had come and had brought disillusion in its wake.

The glass-bead curtain jingled, and a maid backed through it giggling, followed in a hurry by a European, dressed in a white-duck apology for evening clothes. He seemed a little the worse for drink, but not too drunk to recognize the real Yasmini when he saw her and to blush crimson for having acted like an idiot.

"Queen of the Night!" he said in Hindustanee that was peculiarly mispronounced.

"*Box-wallah!*" she answered under her breath; but she smiled at him, and aloud she said, "Will the sahib pray be seated."

A maid took charge of the man at once, and led him to a seat not far from the middle of the room. Yasmini, whose eyes were on Ranjoor Singh every other second, noticed that the Sikh had summed up the European and already lost all interest.

But there were other footsteps from beyond the curtain. It parted again to admit a second European, a somewhat older man, who glanced back over his shoulder deferentially and, to Yasmini's unerring eye, tried to carry off prudish timidity with an air of knowingness.

"Who is he?" demanded Ranjoor Singh, and Yasmini rattled the bracelets on her ankles loud enough to hide a whisper.

"An agent," she answered. "He has an office here in Delhi. The first man is his clerk who is supposed to be the leader into mischief; they have made him a little drunk lest he understand too much. I have sent a maid to him, that he may understand even less."

THE second man was closely followed by a third, and Yasmini smothered a squeal of excitement, for she saw that Ranjoor Singh's eyes were ablaze at last and that he had sat bolt upright without knowing it. The third man was dressed like the other two in white drill, but he wore his clothes not as they did. He was tall and straight. One could imagine him dressed better.

His quick, intelligent gray eyes swept over the whole room while he took two steps, and at once picked out Yasmini as the mistress of the place; but he waited to bow to her until the first man pointed her out. Then it seemed to Ranjoor Singh—who was watching as minutely as Yasmini in turn watched him—that when he bowed, this tall, confident-looking individual almost clicked his heels together, but remembered not to just in time. The eyes of the East miss no small details. Yasmini, letting her jeweled ankles jingle again, chuckled to Ranjoor Singh.

"And they say he comes from Europe selling goods," she whispered. "The fat man who is frightened claims to be a customer for bales of blankets. Since when has the customer been humble while the seller calls the tune? Look!"

The second arrival and the third sat down together as she spoke; and while the second sat like a merchant, nursing fat hands on a consequential paunch, the third sat straight-backed, kicking a little sideways with his left leg. Ranjoor Singh saw, too, that he kept his heels a little more than a spur's length off from the divan's drapery.

"Listen!" hissed Ranjoor Singh.

Yasmini wriggled closer, and pretended to be watching her maids over by the window.

"That man who came last," said the subahdar-major, "has been told that thou art like a spider, watching from the middle of the web of India."

"Then for once they have told him truth!" she chuckled.

"In the bazaar he asked to be shown men of all the tribes, that he might study their commercial needs. He was told to come here and meet them; and these were sent for from the caravansaries. Is it not so?"

Digitized by Google

"Art thou for the Raj?" asked Yasmini.

"I lead a squadron of Sikh cavalry," said Ranjoor Singh, "and you ask me am I for the Raj?"

"The buffalo that carries water for the office lawn is for the Raj!" said Yasmini.

"Then he and I are brothers."

"And he, yonder—what of him?" She was growing impatient, for the tune was nearly at an end and it would be time presently for her to take up the burden of entertainment.

"He will ask, perhaps, to speak with a Sikh of influence."

"Sahib, 'to hear is to obey,' " she quoted, rising to her feet.

"Listen yet!" commanded Ranjoor Singh. "Serve me in this matter, and there will be great reward. I, who am only one, might die by a dagger, or a rope in the dark, or ground glass in my bread; but then there would be a squadron, and perhaps a regiment to ask questions."

"Perhaps?"

"Perhaps. Who knows?"

Ranjoor Singh spoke from modesty. He was sure of the squadron that he loved so much better than his life, but he did not care to magnify his own importance by claiming the equal regard of the other squadrons, too. But, Yasmini, who never in her life went straight from point to point of an idea and never could believe that anybody else did, supposed he meant that one squadron was in his confidence whereas the rest had not been sounded yet.

"So speaks one who is for the Raj!" she grinned.

She played for profit and amusement, and she never, never, let anybody know which side she had taken in any game. She despised a man who showed his hand to her, as she believed Ranjoor Singh had done. But she only showed contempt when it suited her, and by no means always when she felt it.

When the minor music ceased and all eyes in the room were turned to her, she rose to her feet as a hooded cobra comes toward its prey; she spared a sideways surreptitious smile of confidence for Ranjoor Singh, that no eye caught save his, yet to herself as she turned from him and swayed in the first few steps of a dance that she devised that minute she murmured——

"Buffalo!"

The flutes in the window wailed about mystery. The lights, and the sandal-smoke, and the expectant silence emphasized it. Step by step, as if the spirit of all dancing had its home in her, she told a wordless tale, using her feet and every sinuous muscle as no other woman in all India ever did.

Men say that Yasmini is partly Russian, and that may be true, for she speaks Russian fluently. Russian or not, the members of the Russian ballet are the only others in the world who share her art. Certainly she keeps in touch with Russia, and knows more even than the Indian Government about what goes on beyond India's northern frontier. She makes and magnifies the whole into a mystery; and her dance that night expressed the fascination mystery has for her.

And then she sang. It is her added gift of song that makes Yasmini unique, for she can sing in any of a dozen languages, and beside the love-songs that come southward from the hills, she knows all the interminable ballads of the South and the Central Provinces. But when, as that evening, she is at her best, mixing magic under the eyes of the inquisitive, she sings songs of her own making and almost never the same song twice. She sang that night of the winds of the world, that she claims carry the news to her; although others say her sources of information speak more distinctly.

It seemed that the thread of an idea ran through song and dance alike, and that the hillmen and beyond-the-hills-men, who sat back-to-the-wall and watched, could follow the meaning of it. They began to crowd closer, to squat cross-legged on the floor, in circles one outside the other, until the European three became the center of three rings of men who stared at them with owls' solemnity.

Then Yasmini ceased dancing. Then one of the Europeans drew his watch out; and he had to show it to the other two before he could convince them that they had sat for two hours without wanting to do anything but watch and listen.

"*So wass!*" said one of them—the drunken.

"*Du lieber Gott—schon halb zwölf!*" said the second.

The third man made no remark at all. He was watching Ranjoor Singh.

The subahdar-major had left the divan by the end wall and walked—all grim, straight lines in contrast to Yasmini's curves

Digitized by Google

—to a spot directly facing the three Europeans; and it seemed there sat a hillman on the piece of floor he coveted.

"GET up!" commanded Ranjoor Singh. "Make room!"

The hillman did not budge, for an Afridi pretends to feel for a Sikh the scorn that a Sikh feels truly for Afridis. The flat of Ranjoor Singh's foot came to his assistance, and the hillman budged. In an instant he was on his feet, with a lightning right hand reaching for his knife.

But Yasmini allows no butcher's work on her premises, and her word within those walls is law, since no man knows who is on whose side. Yasmini beckoned him and the Afridi slouched toward her sullenly; she whispered something to him and he started for the stairs at once, without any further protest.

Then there vanished all doubt as to who of the European three was most important. The man who had come in first had accepted sherbet from the maid who sat beside him; he went suddenly from drowsiness to slumber, and the woman spurned his bullet-head away from her shoulder, letting him fall like a log among the cushions. The stout, second man, looked frightened and sat still nursing helpless hands. But the third man sat forward, and the tense silence fell on the assembly as the eyes of every man sought his.

Only Yasmini, hovering in the background, had time to watch anything other than those gray European eyes; she saw that they were interested most in Ranjoor Singh, and the maids who noticed her expression of sweet innocence knew that she was thinking fast.

"You are a Sikh?" said the gray-eyed man; and the crowd drew in its breath, for he spoke Hindustanee with an accent that very few achieve, even with long practise.

"Then you are of a brave nation—you will understand me. The Sikhs are a martial race. Their theory of politics is based on the military spirit—is it not so?"

Ranjoor Singh, who understood and tried to live the Sikh religion with all his gentlemanly might, was there to acquire information, not to impart it. He grunted gravely.

"All martial nations expand eventually. They tell me—I have heard—some of you Sikhs have tried Canada?"

Ranjoor Singh did not wince, though his back stiffened when the men around him grinned; it is a sore point with the Sikhs that Canada does not accept their immigrants.

"Sikhs are admitted into all the German colonies," said the man with the gray eyes. "They are welcome."

"Do many go?" asked Ranjoor Singh.

"That is the point. The Sikhs want a place in the sun from which they are barred at present—eh? Now, Germany——"

"Germany? Where is Germany?" asked Yasmini. She understands the last trick in the art of getting a story on its way. "To the west is England. Farther west, Ameliki. To the north lies Russia. To the south the *kali pani*—ocean. Where is Germany?"

The man with the gray eyes took her literally, since his nation are not slow at seizing opportunity. He launched without a word more of preliminary into a lecture on Germany, that lasted hours and held his audience spellbound. It was colorful, complete; and it did not seem to have been memorized. But that was art.

He had no word of blame for England. He even had praise, when praise made German virtue seem by that much greater; and the inference from first to last was of German super-virtue.

Some one in the crowd—who bore a bullet-mark in proof he did not jest—suggested to him that the British army was the biggest and fiercest in the world. So he told them of a German army, millions strong, that marched in league-long columns—an army, that guarded by the hundred-thousand prosperous factory chimnies that smoked until the central European sky was black.

Long, long after midnight, in a final burst of imagination, he likened Germany to a bee-hive from which a swarm must soon emerge for lack of room inside. And he proved, then, that he knew he had made an impression on them, for he dismissed them with an impudence that would have set them to laughing at him when he first began to speak.

"Ye have my leave to go!" he said, as if he owned the place; and they all went except Ranjoor Singh.

"That is a lot of talk," said Ranjoor Singh, when the last man had started for the stairs. "But what does it amount to? When will the bees swarm?"

Digitized by Google

The German eyed him keenly, but the Sikh's eyes did not flinch.

"What is your rank?" the German asked.

"Squadron leader!"

"Oh."

The two stood up, and now there was no mistake about the German's heels; they clicked. The two were almost of a height, although the Sikh's head-dress made him seem the taller. They were both fine-looking men, and limb for limb they matched.

"IF WAR were in Europe you would be taken there to fight," said the German.

Ranjoor Singh showed no surprise.

"Whether you wanted to fight or not."

There was no hint of laughter in the Sikh's brown eyes.

"Germany has no quarrel with the Sikhs."

"I have heard of none," said Ranjoor Singh.

"Wherever the German flag should fly, after a war, the Sikhs would have free footing."

Ranjoor Singh looked interested, even pleased.

"Who is not against Germany is for her."

"Let us have plain words," said Ranjoor Singh, leading the way to a corner in which he judged they could not be overheard; there he turned suddenly, borrowing a trick from Yasmini.

"I am a Sikh—a patriot. What are you offering?"

"The freedom of the earth!" the German answered. "Self-government! The right to emigrate. Liberty!"

"On what condition? For a bargain has two sides."

"That the Sikhs fail England!"

"When?"

"When the time comes! What is the answer?"

"I will answer when the time comes," answered Ranjoor Singh, saluting stiffly before turning on his heel.

Then he stalked out of the room, with a slight bow to Yasmini as he passed.

"Buffalo!" she murmured after him. "Jat buffalo!"

Then the Germans went away, after some heavy compliments that seemed to amuse Yasmini prodigiously, helping along the man who had drunk sherbet and who now seemed inclined to weep. They dragged him down the stairs between them, backwards, and she waited at the stair-head until she heard them pull him into a *gharri* and drive away. Then she turned to her favorite maid.

"Them—those cattle—I understand!" she said. "But it does not suit me that a Sikh, a Jat, a buffalo, should come here making mysteries of his own without consulting me! And what does not suit me I do not tolerate! Go, get that Afridi whom the soldier kicked—I told him to wait outside in the street until I sent for him."

The Afridi came, nearly as helpless as the man who had drunk sherbet, though less tearful and almost infinitely more resentful. What clothing had not been torn from him was soaked in blood and there was no inch of him that was not bruised.

"Krishna!" said Yasmini impiously.

"Allah!" swore the Afridi.

"Who did it? What has happened?"

"Outside in the street I said to some men who waited that Ranjoor Singh the Sikh is a bastard. From then until now they beat me, only leaving off to follow him hence when he came out through the door!"

Yasmini laughed, peal upon peal of silver laughter—of sheer merriment.

"The gods love Yasmini!" she chuckled. "Even the gods love me! The Jat spoke of a squadron; it is evident that he spoke truth. So his squadron watched him here! Go, *jungli!* Go, wash the blood away. Thou shalt have revenge! Come again tomorrow. Nay, go now, I would sleep when I have finished laughing. Aye—the gods love Yasmini!"

CHAPTER III

Have you heard the dry earth shrug herself
For a storm that tore the trees?

Have you watched loot-hungry Faithful
Praising Allah on their knees?

Have you felt the short hairs rising
When the moon slipped out of sight,

And the chink of steel on rock explained
That footfall in the night?

Have you seen a gray boar sniff up-wind
In the mauve of waking day?

Have you heard a hushed crowd pause and think?
Have you seen all hell to pay?

THE Colonel of Outram's Own dropped into a club where he was only one, and not the greatest, of many men entitled

Digitized by Google

to respect. There were three men talking by a window, their voices drowned by the din of rain on the veranda roof, who each nodded to him, but he chose a solitary chair for, though subalterns do not believe it, a colonel has exactly the same diffidence about approaching senior civilians that a subaltern ought to feel.

In a moment all that was visible of him from the door was a pair of brown riding-boots, very much fore-shortened, resting on the long arm of a cane chair, and two sets of wonderfully modeled fingers that held up a newspaper. From the window where the three men talked he could be seen in profile.

"Wears well—don't he?" said one of them.

"Swears well too, confound him!"

"Hah! Been trying to pump him, eh?"

"Yes. He's like a big bird catching flies—picks off your questions one at a time, with one eye on you and the other one cocked for the next question. Get nothing out of him but yes, or no. Good fellow, though, when you're not drawing him."

"You mean trying to draw him. He's the best that come. Wish they were all like Kirby."

The man who had not spoken yet—he looked younger, was some years older, and watched the faces of the other two while seeming to listen to something in the distance—looked at a cheap watch nervously.

"Wish the Sikhs were all like Kirby!" he said. "If this business comes to a head, we're going to wish we had a million Kirbys. What did he say? Temper of his men excellent, I suppose?"

"Used that one word."

"Um-m-m! No suspicions, eh?"

"Said, 'No, no suspicions!'"

"Uh! I'll have a word with him."

He waddled off, shaking his drab silk suit into shape and twisting a leather watch-guard around his finger.

"Believe it will come to anything?" asked one of the two men he had left behind.

"Dunno. Hope not. Awful business if it does."

"Remember how we were promised a world-war two years ago, just before the Balkans took fire?"

"Yes. That was a near thing too. But they weren't quite ready then. Now they are ready, and they think we're not. If I were asked, I'd say we ought to let them know we're ready for 'em. They want to fight because they think they can catch us napping; they'd think twice if they knew they couldn't do it."

"Are they blind and deaf? Can't they see and hear?"

"*Quem deus vult perdere, prius dementat,* Ponsonby, my boy."

The man in drab silk slipped into a chair next Kirby's as a wolf slips into his lair, very circumspectly but without noise; then he retched the chair sideways toward Kirby with about as much noise as a company of infantry would make.

"Had a drink?" he asked, as Kirby looked up from his paper. "Have one?"

"Ginger ale, please," said Kirby, putting the paper down.

A turbaned waiter brought long glasses in which ice tinkled, and the two sipped slowly, not looking at each other.

"KNOW Yasmini?" asked the man in drab silk suddenly.

"Heard of her, of course."

"Ever see her?"

"No."

"Ah. Most extraordinary woman. Wonderful!"

Kirby looked puzzled, and held his peace.

"Any of your officers ever visit her?"

"Not when they're supposed to be on duty."

"But at other times?"

"None of my affair if they do. Don't know, I'm sure."

"Um-m-m!"

"Yes," said Kirby without vehemence.

"Look at his beak!" said one of the two men by the window. "Never see a big bird act that way? Look at his bright eye!"

"Wish mine were as bright, and my beak as aquiline; means directness—soldierly directness, that does!"

"Who is your best native officer, supposing you've any choice?" asked the man in the drab silk suit, speaking to the ceiling apparently.

"Ranjoor Singh," said Kirby promptly.

It was quite clear there was no doubt in his mind.

"How is he best? In what way?"

"Best man I've got. Fit to command the regiment."

"Um-m-m!"

"Yes," said Kirby.

The man in drab sat sideways and caught

Digitized by Google

Kirby's eye, which was not difficult. There was nothing furtive about him.

"With a censorship that isn't admitted, that must have been rather obvious for more than a month—with all forces undergoing field training during the worst of the rains—it's fair to suppose your men smell something?"

"They've been sweating too hard to do much smelling."

"But they do smell?"

"Yes."

"Ask questions?"

"Yes."

"What do you tell them?"

"That I don't know, and they must wait until I do."

"Any recent efforts been made to tamper with them?"

"Not more than I reported. You know of course of the translations from Canadian papers, discussing the rejection of Sikh immigrants? Each man received a copy through the mail."

"Yes. We caught the crowd who printed that. Couldn't discover, though, how it got into the regiment's mail bags without being postmarked. Let's see—wasn't Ranjoor Singh officer-of-the-day?"

"Yes."

"Um-m-m! Would it surprise you to know that Ranjoor Singh visits Yasmini?"

"Wouldn't interest me."

"What follows is in strict confidence, please."

"I'm listening."

"I want you to hear reason. India, the whole of India, mind, has its ear to the ground. All up and down the length of the land—in every bazaar—in the ranks of every native regiment—it's known that people representing some other European Power are trying to sow discontent with our rule; and it's obvious to any native that we're on the watch for something big that we expect to break any minute. Is that clear?"

"Yes."

"Our strongest card is the loyalty of the native troops."

"Yes."

"Everybody knows that. Also, this thing we're looking for is most damnably real—might burst today, tomorrow—any time. So, even with the censorship in working order, it wouldn't be wise to arrest a native officer merely on suspicion."

"I'd arrest one of mine," said Kirby, "if I had reason to suspect him for a second."

"Wouldn't be wise! You mustn't!" The man in drab silk shook his head. "Now, suppose you were to arrest Ranjoor Singh——"

Kirby laughed outright.

"Suppose the Chandni Chowk were Regent Street!" he jeered.

"Last night," said the man in drab silk, "Subahdar-major Ranjoor Singh visited Yasmini, leaving six or more of the men of his squadron waiting for him in the street outside. In Yasmini's room he listened for hours to a lecture on Germany, delivered by a German who has British naturalization papers, whether forged or not is not yet clear.

"After the lecture he had a private conversation lasting some minutes with the German who says he is an Englishman, and who by the way speaks Hindustanee like a native. And before he started home, his men who waited in the street thrashed an Afridi within an inch of his life for threatening to report Ranjoor Singh's presence at the lecture to the authorities."

"Who told you this?" asked Colonel Kirby.

"The Afridi—Yasmini—three hillmen who were there by invitation. Spoke with them all less than an hour ago. They all agree.

"But if Ranjoor Singh were asked about it he could lie himself out of it in any of a dozen ways, and would be on his guard in future. If he were arrested it would bring to a head what may prove to be a passing trifle; it would make the men angry, and the news would spread, whatever we might do to prevent it."

"What am I to understand that you want, then?" asked Kirby.

"Watch him closely, without letting him suspect it."

"Before I'd consider orders to do that seriously, they'd have to come through military channels in the regular way," said Kirby without emotion.

"I could arrange that, of course. I'll mention it to Todhunter."

"And if the order reached me in the regular way, I'd resign rather than carry it out," Kirby replied.

"Um-m-m!" said the man in drab silk.

"Yes," said Kirby.

"You seem to forget that I, too, represent

Digitized by Google

a Government department, and have the country's interests at heart. Do you imagine I have a grudge against Ranjoor Singh?"

"I forgot nothing of the kind," said Kirby, "and imagination doesn't enter into it. I know Ranjoor Singh, and that's enough. If he's a traitor, so am I. If he's not a loyal, gallant officer, then I'm not either. I'll stand or fall by his honor, for I know the man and you don't."

"Uh!" said the man in drab silk.

"Yes," said Colonel Kirby.

"LOOK!" said one of the two men at the window. "Direct as a hornet's sting—isn't a kink in him! Look at the angle of his chin!"

"You can tell his Sikh officers; they imitate him."

"Do I understand you to refuse me point blank?" asked the man in the drab suit, still fidgeting with his watch-guard. Perhaps he guessed that two men in the window were discussing him.

"Yes," said Kirby.

"I shall have to go over your head."

"Understand me, then," explained Kirby quietly. "If an order of that kind reaches me, I shall arrest Ranjoor Singh at once, so that he may stand trial and be cleared like a gentleman. I'll have nothing done to one of my officers that would be intolerable if done to me, so long as I command the regiment!"

"What alternative do you suggest?" asked the man in gray, with a wry face that impressed Kirby not at all.

"Ask Ranjoor Singh what about it."

"Who? You or I?"

"He wouldn't answer you."

"Then ask him yourself," came the quick retort. "But I shall remember, Colonel Kirby, that you did not oblige me in the matter."

"Very well," said Kirby.

"Another drink?"

"No thanks."

"Who won?" asked one of the two men in the window.

"Kirby!"

"I don't think so. I've been watching his face. He's the least bit rattled. It's somebody else who has won; he's been fighting another man's battle. But it's obvious who lost—look at that watch-chain going! Come away."

CHAPTER IV

Does a lock confront thee, brother? Are the guards awake?
Must thou win to what's within? Are life and death at stake?
Do forged keys fail? Of no avail
Is force? The hinges hold?
Then toss thy tools for use of fools
And—pay—thy—way—with—*gold*.

OF COURSE an Afridi can be depended on to overdo anything. The particular Afridi whom Ranjoor Singh had kicked was able to see very little virtue in Yasmini's method of attack. Suckled in a mountain-range where vengeance is believed as real and worthy as love must be transitory, his very bowels ached for physical retaliation, just as his skin and bones smarted from the beating the subahdar-major's men had given him.

He was scoffed at by small boys as he slunk through byways of the big bazaar. A woman who had smiled at him but a day ago now emptied unseemly things on him from an upper story when he went to moan beneath her window. He decided to include that woman in his vengeance, too, if possible, but not to miss Ranjoor Singh on her account; there was not room for him and Ranjoor Singh on one rain-pelted earth, but if needs must, the woman might wait a while.

As nearly all humans always do when their mood is similar to his, he slunk into dark places, growling like a dog and believing all the world his enemy. He came very near to the summit of exasperation when, on making application at a free dispensary, his sores were dressed for him by a Hindu assistant apothecary who lectured him on brotherly love with interlarded excerpts from Carlyle, done into Hindustanee. But the climax came when a native policeman poked him in the ribs with a truncheon and ordered him out of sight.

With a snarl that would have done credit to a panther driven off its prey, he slunk up a byway, to shelter himself and think of new obscenities; and as he stood beneath a cloth awning to await the passing of a more than usually heavy downpour, the rotten fibers burst at last and let ten gallons of filthy rain down on him.

From that minute he could see only red; so it was in a red haze that two of the troopers from Ranjoor Singh's squadron passed the end of the lane. He felt himself

Digitized by Google

clutching at a red knife, breathing red air through distended nostrils. He forgot his sores; forgot to feel them.

As he hunted the two troopers through the maze of streets, he recognized them for two of the men who had thrashed him; so he drew closer, for fear they might escape him in the crowd. Now that he no longer wandered objectless, but looked ahead and walked with a will and a purpose, street-corner "constabeels" ceased to trouble him; there were too many people in those thronged, kaleidoscopic streets for any but the loafers to be noticed. He drew nearer and nearer to the troopers, all unsuspected.

But the pace was fast, and they approached their barracks where his chance of ramming a knife into them and getting away unseen would be increasingly more remote; and he had no desire to die until he had killed the other four men, Ranjoor Singh himself, and the woman who had spurned his love. He must kill these, he decided, while yet safe from barrack hue and cry.

He crept yet closer, and—now that his plan was forming in his mind—began to see less red. In a minute more he recognized a house at a street corner, whose lower story once had been a shop, but that now was boarded up and showed from outside little sign of occupation. But he saw that the door at the end of an alley by the building was ajar, and through a chink between the shutters of an upper story his keen northern eyes detected lamplight. That was enough. He set his teeth and drew his long, clean knife.

Wounds, bruises, pain, all mean nothing to a hillman when there is murder in his eye, unless they be spurs that goad him to greater frenzy and more speed. The troopers swaggered at a drilled man's marching pace; he came like a wind-devil, ripping down a gully from the northern hills, all frenzy.

Had he not seen red again; had only a little brain-work mingled in his rage, he would have scored a clean victory and have been free to wreak red vengeance on the rest. But he was wishing he had killed a sahib who cross-questioned him that afternoon; by and by he would kill Yasmini, who had laughed at him. All Sikhs ought to die, and surely these two should! He yelled as he drove the long knife home between the shoulders of the left hand of the two.

IT WAS a mistake to yell, for he was dealing with picked, drilled men of birth and a certain education. The struck man sunk to his knees, but the other turned in time to guard the next blow with his forearm; he seized a good fistful of the Afridi's bandages and landed hard on his naked foot with the heel of an ammunition boot. The Afridi screamed like a wild beast as he wrenched himself away, leaving the bandages in the trooper's hand; and for an instant the trooper half turned to succor his comrade.

"Nay, after him!" urged the wounded man in the Jat tongue, and seeing a crowd come running from four directions, the Sikh let him lie, to race after the Afridi.

He caught little more than a glimpse of torn clothes disappearing through the little door at the end of the alley by the boarded shop, and a second after he had started in pursuit he saw the door slam shut and thought he heard a bolt snick home.

The door, though small, looked stout, and thinking as he charged to the assault the Sikh put all the advantage he had of weight, and steel-shod boots, and strength, and speed into the effort. A yard from the door he took off, as a man does at the broad jump in the inter-regimental sports, landing against the lower panel with his heels two feet from the bottom.

The door went inward as if struck by a blast of dynamite, and the Sikh's head struck a flagstone. Long, strong arms seized him by the feet and dragged him inside. Then the door closed again, and this time a bolt really did shoot home, to be followed by two others and a beam that fitted vertically into the beam above and the floor beneath.

Outside, thirty feet from the street corner, the crowd came together as a tide-race meets amid the rocks, roaring, shouting, surging, swaying back and forth, nine-tenths questioning at the limit of its lungs and one-tenth yelling information that was false before they had it. Those at the back believed already that there were ten men down. In the next street there was supposed to be a riot. And the shrill repeated whistle of the nearest policeman summoning help confirmed the crowd in its belief besides convincing it of new atrocities as yet unguessed.

Only one man in the crowd had wit enough to carry the tale to barracks where

Digitized by Google

it might be expected to produce action; he was a Bengali babu, bare of leg and fat of paunch, who had enough imagination to conceive a regiment in receipt of the news, and the mental picture so appealed to him that he held his protruding stomach in both hands while he ran down-street like a landslide, his mouth agape and his eyes all but popping from his head.

He reached the barrack gate speechless and breathless, just as Ranjoor Singh rode up on Bagh, mud-plastered after an afternoon's work teaching scouts. He clung to the subahdar-major's stirrup, and was dragged ten feet, slobbering and bubbling incoherencies before the savage charger could be reined in and made to stand.

"What is it, oh *babuji?*" laughed Ranjoor Singh. "Are the Moslems out after your temple gods?"

"Aha! Run! Gallop! Bring all the guns!" This in English, all of it. "Blood in the gutter—blood like water—twentee policemen are already dead, and your men have done it! Gallop, quicklee. *Jaldee, jaldee!*"

"Go and get twenty more policemen to wipe away the blood!" advised Ranjoor Singh, sitting back in the saddle to get a better look at him, and reining back the impatient Bagh. "I am not a constabeel, I am a soldier."

"Aha! Yes. You better hurry. All your men are underneath—what-you-call-it?—bottom dog. You better hurry like ——! One Afridi is beginning things, and where is one Afridi with a long knife there are many kinds of trouble!"

The babu was recovering his breath, and with it his yearning to behold a regiment careering through the barrack gate to the rescue. He still clung to the stirrup, and since he would not let go Ranjoor Singh proceeded to tow him, with a cautious-booted right leg ready to spur Bagh away to the left should the brute commence to kick.

"You are a hard-hearted person, and your fate is sealed if you refuse to listen!" wailed the babu. "The blood of your men lies in the street, calling aloud for vengeance!" A university education works wonders for babu vocabulary. "I tell you it is a riot, and most extremelee serious affair!"

That was the wrong appeal to make, as the babu himself would have known had he been less excited. In time of riot the place for a Sikh officer would be at the regiment's headquarters, in readiness for the order from a civil magistrate without which interference would cost him his commission. But the babu was beside himself, what with breathlessness and disappointment. He decided it was expedient to strengthen his appeal, and his imagination was still working.

"There will be two regiments of Tommees —drunken Tommees, presentlee. They will take your men to jail. The Tommees are already on the way. Should they get there first your men will be everlastinglee disgraced as well as mulcted. You should hurry!"

Ranjoor Singh ceased from frowning and looked satisfied. If there were trouble enough in the bazaar to call for the dispatch of British soldiers to the scene, then nothing in the world was more absolutely certain than that any men of his who happened to be in danger would be rescued with neatness and speed. If there was no trouble yet, there would very likely be some swearing when the soldiers got there. In the meantime he was wet through, both with rain and perspiration. The thought of a bath and dry clothes urged him like the voice of a siren calling; and he had shown the babu all the courtesy his Sikh creed and profession demanded.

So he clucked to Bagh, and the big brute plunged into a canter, just as eager for his sais and gram as his master was for clean dry clothes. For two strides the babu clung to the stirrup, wrenching it free from the subahdar-major's foot; then the horse grew savage at the unaccustomed extra weight and lashed out hard behind him, missing the babu twice in quick succession but filling him full to the stuttering teeth with a fear that balked expression. Ranjoor Singh touched the horse with his right spur, and in a second the babu lay alone on his stomach in the mud, exuding terror.

HE LAY for a minute, believing himself dead. Then he cried aloud, since he knew he must be broken into pieces. Then he felt himself. At last he rose, and after a speechless glance at the back of the subahdar-major he started slowly along the street toward where the "riot" was.

"It is enough," he said in English, since he was a "failed B.A.," "to try the patience of Job's comforter. This militaree business has corrupted even Sikh cavalry until they

Digitized by Google

no longer are dependable. Yes. It is time! It is time indeed that German influence be felt, in order that British yoke may be cast off for good and all. Now, I take it a German soldier would have arrested everybodee, and I would have received much *kudos* in addition to cash reward paid for information. In meantime, it is to be seen whether or not—yes, precisely—a pencil is mightier than a sword, which means that a babu is superior in wit and general attainments. Let us see!"

He began to run again, at a truly astonishing pace considering his paunch and all-around ungainliness, getting over the ground faster than many a thin man could have done. As he ran his lips worked, for though he had no breath to spare for speech his brain was forming words that crowded for expression.

"The Sikhs!" he screamed, as he came within earshot of the milling crowd, through which four small policemen were trying to force a path. "The Sikhs! They ride to the rescue!"

"The Sikhs!" yelled somebody on the edge of the crowd, who had more breath but not enough imagination to ask questions. "The Sikhs are coming! Run!"

"The Sikhs! The Sikhs!"

The crowd took it up. And since it was a crowd, and there was nothing else to do; and since it had had protection but no violence at Sikh hands ever since '57; and since the babu really did look frightened, it shouted that the Sikhs were coming until it believed the news and had made itself thoroughly afraid.

"Run, brothers!" shouted some man in the middle who owned a voice like a bull-buffalo's. And that being a new idea and just as good as any, the whole crowd took to its heels, leaving the four policemen staring at the body of a dead Sikh, and the fat babu complacently regarding all of them.

Presently a European police officer trotted up on a white pony, examined the Sikh, asked a dozen questions of the four policemen, wrote in his memorandum book, and ordered the body taken to the morgue.

"Come here, you!" he called to the babu; so the babu waddled to him, judging his salaam shrewdly so that it suggested deference while leaving no doubt as to the intended insult.

"What do you know about this?"

"As peaceful citizen in pursuance of daily bread and other perquisites, I claim protection of police! While proceeding on way was thrown to ground violentlee by galloping horse whose rider urged same in opposite direction. Observe my deshabille. Regard this mud on my person. I insist on full rigor of the law for which I am taxed inordinately."

"What sort of a horse? Who rode it? How long ago?"

"Am losing all count of time since being overwhelmed. Should say veree recently, however. The horse was ridden by a person who urged it vehemently. It was a brown horse, I think."

"Which way did he go?"

"How should I know? He went away, knocking me over in transit and causing me great distress."

"Was he armed?"

"Two arms. With one he steered the animal. With the other he urged him, thus."

The babu described in pantomime an imaginary human riding for his life, whom not even the adroitest police officer could recognize as Ranjoor Singh, even had he been acquainted with the subahdar-major.

"Had he a weapon of any kind?"

"Not knowing, would prefer to say nothing about that. It was with the horse—with the rump of the animal that he hit me, and not with a sword of any kind."

"Well, you'd better come with me to the office and we'll take down your deposition."

"Am I arrested?"

"No. You're a witness."

"On the contrary, I am prosecutor! I demand as stated formerly full rigor of the law. I demand capture and arrest together with fine and imprisonment of party assaulting me, failing which I shall address complaint to Government!"

"Come along. We'll talk about that at the office."

So the babu was escorted to the stuffy little police office, where he was made to sit on a bench beside ten native witnesses of other crimes; and presently he was called to a desk at which a native clerk presided. There he was made to recite his story again, and since he had had time in which to think, he told a most amazing, disconnected yarn that looked even more untruthful by the time the clerk had written his own version of it on a sheet. To this version the babu

Digitized by Google

was required to swear, and he did so without a blink.

Then there was more delay, while somebody was found who knew him and could certify to his address, and it was nearly evening by the time he was allowed to go.

IT WAS nearly evening by the time that a messenger arrived at the barracks to report the death of a Sikh trooper by murder in the bazaar. The man's name and regimental number proved him to have been one of Squadron D's men, and since its commander, Ranjoor Singh, was then in quarters, the news was brought to him at once.

"Killed where?" he demanded; so they told him.

"Exactly when?"

It became evident to Ranjoor Singh that there had been some truth after all in the babu's tale. The verbal precis of the only witness, given from memory, about a man who galloped away on horseback, threw no light at all on the case; so, because he could think of nothing better to do at the moment, the subahdar-major sent for a *tikka-gharri* and drove down to the morgue to identify the body.

On the way back from the morgue he looked in at the police station, but the babu had been gone ten minutes when he arrived.

The police could tell him nothing. It was explained that the crowd directly after the murder had been too great to allow any but those nearest to see anything; and it was admitted that the crowd had been suddenly panic-stricken and had scattered before the police could secure witnesses. So he drove away wondering, ordering the driver to follow the road taken by the murdered trooper.

It was just on the edge of evening, when the lighted street-lamps were yet too pale to show distinctly, that he passed the disused, boarded shop and saw, on the side of the street opposite, the babu who had brought him the story of riot that afternoon. He stopped his carriage and stepped out. On second thoughts he ordered the carriage away, for he was in plain clothes and not likely to attract notice; and he had a suspicion in his mind that he might care to investigate a little on his own account. He walked straight to the babu, and that gentleman eyed him with obvious distrust.

"Did you see my trooper murdered?" demanded Ranjoor Singh; for he had learned directness under Colonel Kirby, and applied it to every difficulty that confronted him.

Natives understand directness from an Englishman, and can parry it; but from another native it bewilders them, just as a left-handed swordsman is bewildered by another left-hander. The babu blinked.

"How much had you seen when you ran to warn me this afternoon?"

The babu looked pitiful. His fat, defenseless body was an absolute contrast to the Sikh's tall, manly figure. His eye was furtive, glancing ever sideways; but the Sikh looked straight and spoke abruptly, though with a note of kindness in his voice.

"There is no need to fear me," he said, since the babu would not answer. "Speak. How much do you know?"

So the babu took heart of grace, producing a voice from somewhere down in his enormous stomach and saying of course the very last thing expected of him.

"Grief chokes me!" he asserted.

"Take care that I choke thee not, *babujil* I have asked a question. I am no lawyer to maneuver for my answer. Did you see that trooper killed?"

The babu nodded; but his nod was not much more than tentative; he could have denied it next minute without calling much on his imagination.

"Oh! Which way went the murderer?"

"Grief overwhelms me!" said the babu.

"Grief for what?"

"For my money—my good money—my emoluments!"

Direct as an arrow though he was in all his dealings, Ranjoor Singh had not forgotten how the Old East thinks. He recognized the preliminaries of a bargain and searched his mind to recall how much money he had with him; to have searched his pocket would have been too puerile.

"What of them?"

"Lost!"

"Where? How?"

"While standing here, observing movements of him whom I suspected to be murderer, a person unknown—possibly a Sikh — perhaps not — removed money surreptitiously from my person."

"How much money?"

"Rupees twenty-five, annas eight," said the babu unwinking. He neither blushed nor hesitated.

"I will take compassion on your loss and

Digitized by Google

replace five rupees of it," said Ranjoor Singh, "when you have told me which way the murderer went."

"My eyes are too dim, and my heart too full with grief," said the babu. "No man's memory works under such conditions. Now, that money——"

"I will give you ten rupees," said Ranjoor Singh.

THIS was too easy! The babu was prepared to bargain for an hour, fighting for rupee after rupee until his wit assured him he had reached the limit. Now he began to believe he had set the limit far too low.

"I do not remember," he said slowly but with great conviction, scratching at his stomach as if he kept his recollections there.

"You said twenty-five rupees, eight annas? Well. I will pay the half of it, and no more," said Ranjoor Singh in a new voice that seemed to suggest unutterable things. "Moreover I will pay it when I have proved thy memory true. Now, scratch that belly of thine and let the thoughts come forth!"

"Nay, sahib, I forget."

Ranjoor Singh drew out his purse and counted twelve rupees and three quarters into the palm of his hand.

"Which way?" he demanded.

"Twenty-five rupees, eight annas of earned emolument—gone while I watched the movements of a murderer! It is not easy to keep brave heart and remember things!"

"See here, thou belly full of memories! Remember and tell me, or I return this money to my purse and march thee by the nape of thy fat neck to the police station, where they will put thee in a cell for the night and jog thy memory in ways the police are said to understand! Speak! Here, take the money!"

The babu reached out a fat hand and the silver changed owners.

"There!" said the babu, jerking a thumb over his shoulder. "Through that door!"

"That narrow teak door, down the passage?"

But the babu was gone, hurrying as if the fear of hell and all its angels goaded him, showing a hairy thigh through the folds of his loin-cloth as he ran.

Ranjoor Singh strode over the street in a bee-line and entered the dark passage without a second's hesitation. He had seen the yellow light of a lamp-flame through a chink in an upper shutter, and he intended to try directness on the problem once again. It was ten full paces down the passage to the door; he counted them, finishing the last one with a kick against the panel that would have driven it in had it been less than teak.

There came no answer, so he kicked again. Then he beat on the door with his clenched fists. Presently he turned his back to the door and kept up a steady thunder on it with his heels. And then, after about five minutes, he heard movement within.

He congratulated himself then that the noise he had made had called the attention of passers-by and of all the neighbors, and though he had had no fear and no other intention than to enter the house at all costs, he had that much less compunction now.

He heard three different bolts drawn back, and then there was a pause. He thought he heard whispering, so he began to hammer again. Almost at once there followed the unmistakable squeak of a big beam turning on its pivot, and the door opened about an inch.

He pushed, but some one inside pushed harder, and the door closed again. So Ranjoor Singh leaned all his weight and strength against the door, drawing in his breath and shoving with all his might. Resistance ceased. The door flew inward as it had done once before that day, and closed with a bang behind him.

CHAPTER V

Long were the days and oh, wicked the weather,
  Endless and thankless the round;
Grinding God's grit into rookies together,
I was the upper stone, he was the nether,
  And Gad, sir, they groaned as we ground!

Bitter the blame (but he helped me to bear it),
  Grim the despair that we ate!
But hell's loose! The dam's down, and none can repair it!
'Tis our turn! Go, summon my brother to share it!
  His squadron's at arms, and we wait!

A REGIMENT is more exacting of its colonel than ever was lady of her lord; the more truly he commands, the better it loves him, until at last the regiment swallows him and he becomes part of it, in thought and word and deed. Distractions such as polo, pig-sticking, tiger-shooting, are tolerable in-so-far as they steady his nerve and train his hand and eye; to that

Digitized by Google

extent they, too, subserve the regiment. But a woman is a rival. So it is counted no sin against a cavalry Colonel should he be a bachelor.

There remained no virtue, then, in the eyes of Outram's Own for Colonel Kirby to acquire; he had all that they could imagine besides at least a dozen they had not imagined before he came to them. There was not one black-bearded gentleman who couched a lance behind him but believed Colonel Kirby some sort of superman; and in return, Colonel Kirby found the regiment so satisfying that there was not even a lady so-to-speak on the skyline who could look forward to encroaching on the regiment's preserves.

His heart, his honor, and his rare ability were all the regiment's, and the regiment knew it; so he was studied as is the lot of few. His servant knew which shoes he would wear on a Thursday morning, and would have them ready; the mess-cook spiced the curry so exactly to his taste that more than one cook-book claimed it to be a species apart and labeled it with his name. If he frowned, the troopers knew somebody had tried to flatter him; if he smiled the regiment grinned; and when his face lacked all expression—though his eyes were more than usually quick—officer, non-commissioned officer, and man alike would sit tight in the saddle, so-to-speak, and gather up their reins.

His mood was recognized that afternoon while he was yet four hundred yards away, although twilight was closing down. The waler mare—sixteen three and a half, with one white stocking and a blaze that could be seen from the skyline—brought his big dog-cart through the street mud at a speed which would have insured the arrest of the driver of an auto; but that, if anything, was a sign of ordinary health.

Nor was the way he took the corner by the barrack gate, on one wheel, any criterion; he always did it, just as he never failed to acknowledge the sentry's salute by raising his whip. It needed the observant eyes of Outram's Own to detect the rather strained calmness, and almost inhumanely active eye.

"Beware!" called the sentry, while he was yet three hundred yards away. "Be awake!"

"Be awake! Be awake! Beware!"

The warning went from lip to lip, troop to troop, from squadron stables on to squadron stables, until six hundred men were ready for all contingencies. A civilian might not have recognized the difference, but Kirby's soldier servant wakened from his nap on the Colonel's door-mat and straightened his turban in a hurry, perfectly well aware that there was something in the wind.

It was too early to dress for dinner yet; too late to dress for games of any kind. The servant was nonplussed. He stood in silence, awaiting orders that under ordinary circumstances, or at an ordinary hour would have been unnecessary. The only sound in those extremely unmarried quarters was the steady drip of water into a flat tin bath, that the servant had put beneath a spot where the roof leaked; the rain had ceased, but the ceiling-cloth still drooped and drooled.

Suddenly Kirby threw himself backward into a long chair, and the servant made ready for swift action.

"Present my compliments to Subahdar-major Ranjoor Singh, sahib, and ask him to be good enough to see me here."

The servant saluted and was gone. Kirby relapsed again into the depth of the chair, staring at the wall in front of him, letting his eye travel from one to another of the accurately spaced-out pictures, pieces of furniture and trophies that proclaimed him unmarried; there was nothing whatever in his quarters to decoy him from his love. There were polo sticks in a corner, where a woman would have placed a standard-lamp; and where the flowers should have stood was a chest to hold horse-medicines. There was a vague smell about the place of varnish, polish and good leather.

The servant was back again, stiff at the salute, within five minutes.

"*Ne hai.*"

"Not there? Not where? Not in his quarters? Then go and find him. Ask where he is. Hurry!"

So, since the regiment was keyed to watchfulness, it took about five minutes more before it was known that Ranjoor Singh was not in barracks. The servant returned to report that he had been seen driving toward the bazaar in a *tikka-gharri*.

Then entered Warrington, the adjutant, and the servant was dismissed at once.

"Bad business," said Warrington, looking thoroughly cheerful.

Digitized by Google

"What now?"

"One of Squadron D's men murdered in the bazaar this afternoon. Body's in the morgue in charge of the police. 'Nother man who was with him apparently missing. No explanation, and the p'lice say there aren't any clues."

He twisted at a little black moustache and began to hum.

"Know where Ranjoor Singh is by any chance?" asked Kirby.

"Give me three guesses—no, two. One—he's raising hell with all the police in Delhi. Two—he's at the scene of the murder, doing detective work on his own. I heard he'd driven away—and anyhow it's his squadron. Man's probably his second cousin, twenty or thirty times removed."

"Send somebody to find him!" ordered Kirby.

"Say you want to have a word with him?"

Kirby nodded, and Warrington swaggered out, humming to himself exactly as he hoped to be humming when his last grim call should come, the incarnation of efficiency, awake and very glad. A certain number of seconds after he had gone, two mounted troopers clattered out toward the bazaar. Ten minutes later he returned.

"D SQUADRON'S squattin' on its hunkers in rings an' lookin' gloomy," he said as if he were announcing some good news that had a touch of humor in it. "By the look of 'em you'd say they'd been passed over for active service and were meditatin' matrimony."

"By Gad, Warrington! You don't know how near that guess is to the truth!"

Kirby's lips were smiling, but his voice was hard. Warrington glanced quickly at him once and then looked serious.

"You mean——"

"Yes," said Kirby.

"Has it broken yet?"

"No."

"Is it goin' to break?"

"Looks like it. Looks to me as if it's all been pre-arranged. Our crowd are sparring for time, and the Prussians are all in a hurry. Looks that way to me."

"And you mean—there's a chance—even a chance of us—of Outram's Own bein' out of it? Beg your pardon, sir, but are you serious?"

"Yes," said Kirby, and Warrington's jaw fell.

"Any details that are not too confidential for me to know?" asked Warrington.

"Tell you all about it after I've had word with Ranjoor Singh."

"Hadn't I better go and help look for him?"

"Yes, if you like."

So, within another certain number of split seconds, Captain Charlie Warrington rode, as the French say, belly-to-the-earth, and the fact that the Monsoon chose that instant to let pour another Noah's deluge seemed to make no difference at all to his ardor or the pace at which he spurred his horse.

An angry police officer grumbled that night at the club about the arrogance of all cavalrymen, but of one Warrington in particular.

"Wanted to know, by the Big Blue Bull of Bashan, whether I knew when a case was serious or not! Yes he did! Seemed to think the murder of one sowar was the only criminal case in all Delhi, and had the nerve to invite me to sic every constable in what he termed my parish on the one job. What did I say? Told him to call tomorrow, of course—said I'd see! Gad! You should have heard him swear then—thought his eyes 'ud burn holes in my tunic. Went careering out of the office as if war had been declared."

"Talking of war," said somebody, nursing a long drink under the swinging punkah, "do you suppose——"

So the manners of India's pet cavalry were forgotten at once in the vortex of the only topic that had interest for any one in clubdom, and it was not noticed whether Warrington or his colonel, or any other officer of native cavalry looked in at the club that night.

WARRINGTON rode into the rain at the same speed at which he had galloped to the police station, overhauled one of the mounted troopers, whom he himself had sent in search of Ranjoor Singh, rated him soundly in Punjabi for loafing on the way, and galloped on with the troop-horse laboring in his wake. He reined in abreast of the second trooper, who had halted by a cross-street and was trying to appear to enjoy the deluge.

"Any word?" asked Warrington.

"I spoke with two who said he entered by that door—that small door down the

Digitized by Google

passage, sahib, where there is no light. It is a teak door, bolted and with no key-hole on the outside."

"Good for you," said Warrington, glancing quickly up and down the wet street, where the lamps gleamed deceptively in pools of running water. There seemed nobody in sight; but that is a bold guess in Delhi, where the shadows all have eyes.

He gave a quiet order, and trooper number one passed his reins to number two.

"Go and try that door. Kick it in if you can—but be quick, and try not to be noisy!"

The trooper swung out of the saddle and obeyed, while Warrington and the other man faced back to back, watching each way against surprise. In India, as in lands less civilized, the cavalry are not allowed to usurp the functions of police, and the officer or man who tries it dares to at his own risk. There came a sound of sodden thundering on teak that ceased after two minutes.

"The door is stout. There is no answer from within," said the trooper.

"Then wait here on foot," commanded Warrington. "Get under cover and watch. Stay here until you're relieved, unless something particularly worth reporting happens; in that case hurry and report. For instance —" he hesitated, trying to imagine something out of the unimaginable"—suppose the subahdar-major were to come out, then give him the message and come home with him. But—oh, suppose the place takes fire, or there's a riot, or you hear a fight going on inside—then hurry to barracks —understand?"

The wet trooper nodded and saluted.

"Get into a shadow, then, and keep as dry as you can," ordered Warrington. "Come on!" he called to the other man.

And a second later he was charging through the street, as if he rode with dispatches through a zone of rifle-fire. Behind him clattered a rain-soaked trooper and two horses.

Colonel Kirby stepped out of his bath-room just as Warrington arrived, and arranged his white dress-tie before the sitting-room mirror.

"Looks fishy to me, sir," said Warrington, hurrying in and standing where the rain from his wet clothes would do least harm.

There was a space on the floor between two tiger-skins where the matting was a little threadbare. Messengers, orderlies or servants always stood on that spot. But Kirby's servant brought him a bath-room mat after a moment.

"How d'ye mean?"

Warrington explained.

"What did the police say?"

"Said they were busy."

"Now, I could go to the club," mused Kirby, "and see Hetherington, and have a talk with him, and get him to sign a search-warrant. Armed with that we could——"

"Perhaps persuade a police officer to send two constables with it tomorrow morning!" said Warrington with a grin.

"Yes," said Kirby.

"And if we do much on our own account we'll fall foul of the Indian Penal Code, which altereth every week," said Warrington.

"If it weren't for the fact that I particularly want a word with him," said Kirby, giving a last tweak to his tie and reaching out for his mess-jacket that the servant had laid on a chair, "there'd not be much ground that I can see for action of any kind. He has a right to go where he likes."

That point of view did not seem to have occurred to Warrington before, nor did he quite like it, for he frowned.

"On the other hand," said Kirby, diving into his mess-jacket and shrugging his neat shoulders until they fitted into it as a charger fits into his skin, "under the circumstances—and taking into consideration certain private information that has reached me—if I were supposed to be behind a bolted door in the bazaar, I'd rather appreciate it if Ranjoor Singh for instance were to—ah—take action of some kind."

"Exactly, sir."

"Hello—what's that?"

A MOTOR-CAR, driven at racing speed, thundered up the lane between the old stacked cannon and came to a panting standstill by the Colonel's outer door. A gruff question was answered gruffly, and a man's step sounded on the veranda. Then the servant flung the door wide, and a British soldier stepped smartly into the room, saluted and held out a telegram.

Kirby tore it open. His eyes blazed, but his hands were steady. The soldier held out a receipt book and a pencil, and Kirby took time to scribble his initials in the proper space. Warrington, humming to

Digitized by Google

himself, began to squeeze the rain out of his tunic to hide impatience. The soldier saluted, faced about and hurried to the waiting car. Then Kirby read the telegram. He nodded to Warrington. Warrington, his finger-ends pressed tight into his palms, and his forearms quivering, raised one eyebrow.

"Yes," said Kirby.

"War, sir?"

"War."

"We're under orders?"

"Not yet. It says 'War likely to be general; be ready.' Here, read it for yourself."

"They wouldn't have sent us that if——"

"Addressed to O. C. troops. They had those ready written out and sent one to every O. C. on the list the second they knew."

"Well, sir?"

"Leave the room, Lal Singh!"

The servant, who was screwing up his courage to edge nearer, did as he was told.

Kirby stood still, facing the mirror, with both arms behind him.

"They're certain to send native Indian troops to Europe," he said.

"We're ready, sir! We're ready to a shoe-string! We'll go first!"

"We'll be last, Warrington, supposing we go at all, unless we find Ranjoor Singh! They'll send us to do police work in Bengal, or to guard the Bombay docks and watch the other fellows go. I'm going to the club. You'd better come with me. Hurry into dry clothes." He glanced at the clock. "We'll just have time to drive past the house where you say he's supposed to be, if you hurry."

The last three words were lost, for Captain Warrington had turned into a thunderbolt, and disappeared; the noise of his going was as when a sudden windstorm slams all the doors at once. A moment later he could be heard shouting from outside his quarters to his servant to be ready for him.

He certainly bathed, for the noise of the tub overturning when he was done with it was unmistakable. And eight minutes after his departure he was back again, dressed, cloaked, and ready.

"Got your pistol, sir?"

"Yes," said Kirby.

"Thought I'd bring mine along. You never know, you know."

Together they climbed into the Colonel's dog-cart, well smothered under waterproofs. Kirby touched up another of his road-devouring walers, the *sais* grabbed at the back seat and jumped for his life, and they shot out of the compound, down the line of useless cannon and out into the street, taking the corner as the honor of the regiment required. Then the two big side-lamps sent their shafts of light straight down the metaled, muddy road and the horse settled down between them to do his equine damdest, for there was a touch on the reins he recognized.

THEY reached the edge of the bazaar to find the crowd stirring, although strangely mute.

"They'll have got the news in an hour from now," said Kirby. "They can smell it already."

"Wonder how much truth there is in all this talk about German merchants and propaganda."

"*H-rrrrr-ummm!*" said Kirby.

"Steady, sir! Look out!"

The near wheel missed a native woman by a fraction of an inch, and her shrill scream followed them. But Kirby kept his eyes ahead and the shadows continued to flash by them in a swift procession until Warrington leaned forward, and then Kirby leaned back against the reins.

"There he is, sir!"

They reined to a halt, and a drenched trooper jumped up behind to kneel on the back seat and speak in whispers.

"No sign of him at all?" asked Kirby.

"No, sahib. But there has been a light behind a shutter above there. It comes and goes. They light it and extinguish it."

"Has anybody come out of that door?"

"No, sahib."

"None gone in?"

"None."

"Any other door to the place?"

"There may be a dozen, sahib. That is an old house, and it backs up against six others."

"What we suffer from in this country is information," said Warrington, beginning to hum to himself.

But Kirby signed to the trooper and the man began to scramble out of the cart.

"Between now and our return, report to the club if anything happens," called Warrington.

The whip swished, the horse shot

Digitized by Google

forward and they were off again as if they would catch up with the hurrying seconds. People scattered to the right and left in front of them; a constable at a street crossing blew his whistle frantically; once the horse slipped in a deep puddle, and all but came to earth; but they reached the club without mishap and drove up the winding drive at a speed more in keeping with convention.

"Oh, hullo, Kirby! Glad you came!" said a voice.

"Evening, sir."

KIRBY descended, almost into the arms of a General in evening dress. They walked into the club together, leaving the adjutant wondering what to do. He decided to follow them at a decent distance, still humming and looking happy enough for six men.

"You'll be among the first," said the General. "Are you ready, Kirby—absolutely ready?"

"Yes."

"The wires are working to the limit. It isn't settled yet whether troops go from here via Canada or the Red Sea—probably won't be until the Navy's had a chance to clear the road. All that's known—yet—is that Belgium's invaded, and that every living man Jack who can be hurried to the front in time to keep the Germans out of Paris, will be sent. Hold yourself ready to entrain any minute, Kirby."

"Is martial law proclaimed yet?" asked Kirby in a voice that the General seemed to think was strained, for he looked around sharply.

"Not yet. Why?"

"Information, sir. Anything else?"

"No. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

Kirby nearly ran into Warrington as he hurried back toward the door.

"Find a police officer!" he ordered.

"They all passed you a minute ago, sir," answered Warrington. "They're headed for police headquarters. Heard one of 'em say so."

Kirby pulled himself together. A stranger would not have noticed that he needed it, but Warrington at his elbow saw the effort and was glad.

"Go to police headquarters, then," he ordered. "Try to get them to bring a dozen men and search that house, but don't say that Ranjoor Singh's in there."

"Where'll I find you, sir?"

"Barracks. Oh, by the way, we're a sure thing for the front."

"I knew there was some reason why I kept feelin' cheerful!" said Warrington. "The subahdar-major looks like gettin' left."

"Unless," said Kirby, "you can get the police to act tonight—or unless martial law's proclaimed at once and I can think of an excuse to search the house with a hundred men myself. Find somebody to give you a lift. So long."

Kirby swung into his dog-cart, the *sais* did an acrobatic turn behind, and again the horse proceeded to lower records. Zigzag-wise, through streets that were growing more and yet more thronged instead of silenter, they tore barrackward, missing men by a miracle at every dozenth yard. Kirby's eyes were on a red blotch, now, that danced and glowed above the bazaar a mile ahead. It reminded him of pain.

Presently the horse sniffed smoke, and notified as much before settling down into his stride again. The din of hoarse excitement reached Kirby's ears, and in a moment more a khaki figure leaped out of a shadow and a panting trooper snatched at the back seat, was grabbed by the *sais*, and swung up in the rear.

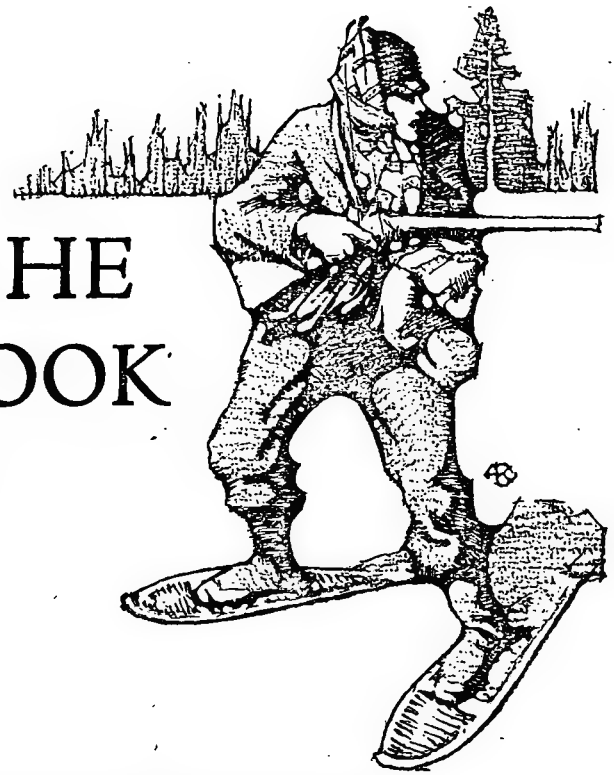
"Sahib——"

"All right. I know," said Kirby, though he did not know how he knew.

They raced through another dozen streets until the glare grew blinding and the smoke nearly choked them. Then they were stopped entirely by the crowd, and Colonel Kirby sat motionless, for he had a nearly perfect view of a holocaust—of the house in which he had little doubt was Ranjoor Singh.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Digitized by Google



ON THE 'BAMTICOOK TRAIL

By
Hugh Pendexter

Author of "The Chelsea Vase," "The Crimson Tracks."

BLISOP, the express agent, was in a black rage when young Tangey entered the low log office. He was savagely cursing someone's heart and liver with specific attention to anatomical detail.

"What's up?" curiously inquired Tangey after listening in deep interest for nearly a minute. "Hobbs said you wanted to see me."

"It's Pete Ronco," bitterly explained the agent. "I stepped out of the office this morning for about ten minutes and he sneaked in and made off with seventeen dollars. I've got to take a day off and run that Injun out of Birchtown. Either that or leave him where I find him to digest an ounce of lead."

Tangey nodded sympathetically. He knew that Ronco, the breed, had inherited all the vices of his white progenitors without losing any of the cunning and malevolence of his aboriginal forebears.

"Want me to help find him?" he asked.

"Hardly," growled Blisop. "But it's on account of him that I sent for you. He blew in yesterday, probably with a sheriff or a game warden camping on his trail. Now I've got to go after him, and that means some one must take my place and cruise down to 'Bamticook and deliver a pouch to the Oxford Trust Company's branch office. If you want to make the hike I'll give you four dollars. It's about fifteen miles, you know."

Tangey's eyes sparkled. To one born to the woods it seemed a ridiculously easy way to earn money. Aside from timber cruising there was nothing in his simple environment that so favorably impressed him as the express agent's job; and he must grow in years and experience before he could find employment in estimating growing timber. It had been one of his choicest day dreams to picture Birchtown growing in importance until the company would be compelled to put on an extra man to serve as messenger. He coveted the job intensely.

"I'd be tickled to death," he grinned. "I'll start now."

Blisop seemed to hesitate and stared

Digitized by Google

uncertainly at the small safe. "I've the authority to send you," he muttered, as if addressing himself, "and yet I don't know but what I ought to make the trip myself. Possibly if I waited till tomorrow——"

"Come now, Blisop," pleaded Tangey, "why not give me the chance? I can do the trick all right. What's fifteen miles in good shoeing?"

Blisop cast a shrewd glance at the leaden canopy pressing close to the crown of the forest, and warned—

"But it looks like snow."

"Snow!" jeered Tangey. "Think I'm a kid? I could follow the 'Bamticook trail blindfolded."

"I guess you could," conceded Blisop, "but there's something else."

And he passed to the door and peered out to make sure there was no eavesdropper. Returning to the table he whispered:

"You're honest, Tangey, and I can trust you. Beeman left eighteen hundred dollars with me last night, paid in to him on a timber deal. It must be deposited in the branch office at 'Bamticook. It ought to go down today, as tomorrow's Saturday and the office won't be open in the afternoon. But with Ronco loose in this neck of the woods——"

"Bah!" hotly broke in Tangey. "Think a half-breed can hold me up and get away with the pouch? I'll tote my rifle along. Fix up the pouch and I'll get my shoes."

"Not much to fix up," mumbled the agent, throwing open the safe. "I'll send nothing but the money. The other stuff can go down on the next tote team."

As he spoke he rapidly ran his fingers through a sheaf of bank-notes, then remained motionless, wavering in his decision.

"Let me go," begged Tangey. "Think I'm a kid?"

With a click of his teeth the agent placed the money in a large envelope and stitched it through with a piece of waxed thread. Then, melting the red wax, he liberally daubed and sealed the package, stamping the company's token on each wafer. Dropping the money into the pouch he brusquely ordered:

"Get your shoes. You must start at once, as you must make it by four o'clock."

Inside of five minutes Tangey returned to the office, prepared for the trip. He held the small pouch and eyed the red seal peeping up at him right proudly as Blisop produced the key and locked it. Then, slinging it on like a haversack, he picked up his rifle and shoes and with a confident wave of the hand darted into the forest.

He would have preferred zero weather for fast walking, but once his shoes were buckled on he struck into a three-mile-an-hour clip, intent on making 'Bamticook before the branch office closed. Two thick slices of bread and a wedge of cheese in one mackinaw pocket would supply him with lunch and would be eaten on the way.

The pouch was rather a sorry affair, worn by much rough treatment. To Tangey it was a sacred thing, a symbol of the company's trust in him. In a crude way he sought to analyze the elements of romance attached to it. Palatial trains might hurry it across continents, swift vehicles might rush it through the city's streets. But up here in the big woods, where nature was dictator, Bob Tangey was the necessary factor. He could go where no steam or motor driven car could penetrate. Let it blow and snow, let the mercury crawl far below zero and he would hold his way staunchly, a small silent figure in a vast waste of silences.

FOR MORE than two hours his joyous optimism ran riot in creating an atmosphere of importance about the errand. Then he came to his everyday senses with a jolt. He found himself at a standstill, fumbling for his map. By the time he opened it he laughed sheepishly and hurriedly thrust it back in his mackinaw.

He was on the trail and had no need for a map. He had brought it along by accident rather than design. Had he left it at home with his compass he would have suffered no inconvenience. Next came the query, spoken inside his mind by an insistent small voice—

"Then why did you stop?"

He frowned and stared about him. Some subtle instinct of the born woodsman had called him away from his fancies. He turned and glanced backwards. With a faint thrill he brought the rifle to a rest in the hollow of his left arm; he knew now. He felt as if some one were following him. He laughed uneasily and glanced reproachfully down at the pouch.

"Guess there's a flavor about eighteen

Digitized by Google

hundred dollars that fusses a man up if he ain't used to toting money around," he soliloquized.

Obviously that was the answer; he had allowed his errand to assume too much importance. Blisop passed back and forth frequently with valuable pouches. Twice a week the mail carrier made the trip to Middle Dam and back and often had valuable registered mail. Occasionally a paymaster——

In a flash the inner monitor reminded that up till now the woods had contained no menace. Ronco had arrived yesterday.

Setting his jaws he plunged doggedly on, endeavoring to make himself believe it was his imagination, not instinct, that had set his young nerves to fluttering. Although he kept his gaze resolutely to the front his thoughts persisted in lagging in the rear, discovering a slinking figure in every crook and turn of the trail.

He covered four miles in this fashion and then wheeled abruptly from the trail and crouched panting behind a thicket of spruce. He executed the maneuver almost before realizing it. His face burned with shame and trepidation. It seemed incredible that he should be losing his nerve. On the other hand he had never been followed before, he defended, now ready to accept his suspicions as a fact.

For several minutes he keenly scrutinized the back track, then his memory stepped in and began recalling all the brutalities charged up to the Indian. This led him to admire the business-like determination of Blisop to set out after the outlaw, and in the same instant to receive the suggestion:

"What if Blisop's pursuit of the Indian has driven him away from Birchtown and along my trail? What if the theft of seventeen dollars is the indirect cause of my losing nearly two thousand, plus my life?"

Only Tangey thought as he spoke, in the vernacular of the woods.

The sequence of cause and effect, as he visualized it, suddenly became tangible and self-proven. He had no doubt but that Ronco was speeding along his trail a half-bowed, sinister form, the murderous rifle carried loosely. Accepting this conclusion, Tangey logically realized that the Indian would read suspicion when he discovered the tracks had broken off into the spruce growth. It would show the Indian that his victim was suspicious and had contemplated an ambush.

To match cunning with cunning he quickly decided to continue on through the woods as if making a short-cut. Once he reached an opening he would wait on the farther side and satisfy himself whether or not he was being followed. If the Indian shrewdly guessed his motive and kept to the main trail, waiting for him to beat back to easy shoeing, he would even then outwit him by cutting in behind him.

If he could get the man before him he knew the cold, creepy feeling between his shoulder blades would vanish. It makes all the difference in the world whether one is following or being followed. As he decided this point his admiration of Blisop's gameness was cut in half. After all, it wasn't such a brave thing for Blisop to chase the Indian as he had first credited.

As thoughts are always associated and never detached, this reflection caused a new wave of uneasiness to sweep over him. What if Blisop had not dared to make the trip because of the danger? Should that be set down to cowardice or an experienced man's decision that death lurked along the way to 'Bamticook. He tried to lose the suggestion by redoubling his speed, but it strode along abreast of him.

Now Tangey wasn't a coward. The ordinary perils and dilemmas of the woods were simply obstacles to be overcome. But if Blisop had shirked a dangerous task, buying immunity for four dollars, one was licensed to feel disturbed. For second thought evidenced conclusively that the agent was no coward.

A FLAKE of snow melting on his nose dismissed his jumbled introspection and sent his eyes upwards. The heavens were settling and a storm was brewing. With puckered brows he stared about for a familiar landmark. He was in a cedar swamp, surrounded by fir and spruce. It must be within a mile or two of the main trail, and yet he could not recall it.

It angered him, this trick of Nature. Once before, when a lad, he had become lost a quarter of a mile from home. True, his confusion on that occasion had lasted but a few minutes, but during the brief bewilderment he had suffered poignantly. It was much like losing one's identity.

Digitized by Google

Now he would have taken oath there was no locality in and around Birchtown or 'Bamticook but that he had visited numberless times. However, here was a new swamp. For the time being he forgot Pete Ronco and addressed himself to the inexplicable dilemma.

Reason sought to assure him it was a well-known spot and that his confusion resulted from his happening to view it from a different perspective; that if he shifted his position a few rods it would become familiar. On the heels of this pressed the exigency of action: he was wasting precious time. Should he follow his tracks back to the main trail, or continue and complete his half circle? The possibility of encountering the half-breed determined him to press ahead.

He was without his compass, an unpardonable offense for a woodsman, and the sun was effectually blotted from view.

"I'll be getting looney next," he worried. "Ronco or no Ronco, I'm going to make the main trail. If the Injun bothers me I'll pot him."

These were brave words, and served to bolster up his courage to the fighting pitch. Then gradually the suspense, the momentary expectation of feeling a bullet, began wearing him down, and with his mind focused on the invisible peril rather than on local topography, he walked hurriedly through the swamp and into the spruce growth.

With no heed to time he pressed on until brought to a halt by the startling discovery of a trail. It was fresh, and with all his objective faculties sharpened to a keen edge he shifted the position of his rifle. It was obvious the Indian had quit the main trail and was swinging around to head him off. He could imagine no one else who would have business in that desolate place. But having the Indian ahead was a different proposition than having him in the rear, and with blazing eyes Tangey increased his pace to a lope, ever searching the trail ahead in quest of a possible ambush.

Possibly half an hour passed in this fashion before he stopped, with some of the reckless courage frozen out of him. Another trail had joined the first and he had two men instead of one in front.

"Either the second feller is after the Injun or else there's two against me," he muttered.

As the former supposition was too good to be true he was forced to abandon it. No; Ronco had been joined by a pal. Once he adopted this conclusion all zest for the chase left him. He was behind them; why shouldn't he take advantage of the situation and strike off at right angles and avoid them?

Then he grew very weak and sank down on a snow-covered log and gasped:

"Good Lawd! It's my own trail."

This disclosure sapped his strength cruelly. It was the second incredible blunder he had made that day, and his faith in himself was sadly shaken. It seemed absurd that he, a woodsman, should have followed the tracks this long without discovering his error. There were the two sets of them, each made by the five-foot shoe, almost diamond-shaped, such as he wore in the lake country.

To eliminate every doubt he crawled to his feet and measured the tracks minutely. In each track the patch near the frog of the right shoe was glaringly plain. Twice he had completed a circle, the second being smaller than the first.

"Been winding myself up like a watch spring," he shuddered, glaring fiercely about.

The shock was more disconcerting than a face-to-face encounter with a dozen Roncos, for it destroyed his self-confidence. To break the spell of blunders he plunged into the underbrush and frantically fought his way in what he believed to be a straight line. Inside of three rods he emerged into the main trail.

"I'll be derned!" he whispered, licking his dry lips and mopping his forehead nervously. "Where've I been and how did I manage to do it? In my home country, too!"

With a puzzled shake of his head he continued to study the surrounding barriers of evergreens till the trail grew natural beneath his gaze and then he resumed his journey, bending every energy to make up for lost time. The clouds were spitting snow quite freely now, but not enough to eliminate snow-shoe tracks, and as there were no fresh traces before him he knew Ronco had not yet passed this way.

For some reason Tangey's experience in losing himself worked to wash much of the first fear out of his soul, and his meditations were largely devoted to explaining away

Digitized by Google

his stupendous error in woodcraft. He had often laughed at the ridiculous plight of city sportsmen, who lost themselves in sight of camp. He would not do so again.

To occupy his thoughts further was the attempt to estimate the time he had wasted in wandering about the swamp. Now that he had found himself he could visualize the swamp in detail, and remembered visiting it the year before when planning to trap mink. It was all so absurd and preposterous that he should become confused; he could only solve the puzzle by deciding his eyes had gone wrong, or that he had studied his surroundings with no brain-sight behind his gaze. Had he been more learned he might have set the experience down to transient aphasia. Anyway, he was sure of himself now, and his shuffling gait grew in confidence.

But with the return of his mental poise he found time to revert to Ronco and speculate as to his probable whereabouts. Instantly the former feeling of uneasiness returned and again he sensed a menace in the rear. Several times he was compelled to halt and stare back over the trail.

As the falling snow interposed a screen between all but immediate objects he felt his peril drawing nearer as his range of vision decreased. Then the wind began blowing clouds of snow from the tops and his nerves promptly advanced Ronco closer.

In a species of panic he quickened his stride, half expecting to hear the soft *thud, thud* of the half-breed's shoes at his heels. By the time he was winded he wheeled in rage and fear, almost wishing the climax could be precipitated. The wind subsided suddenly and the snow ceased falling; once more the trail opened up to his startled gaze far back through the spruce. No animate thing was in sight.

Before he could extract any comfort from this discovery his woodcraft warned that the Indian would not approach him openly, but would creep up unobserved. In this fashion he shifted the trailer's concealment from the blinding snow to the forest on either side of the trail. To clinch the argument he even decided Ronco would draw very close before using his rifle because of his natural desire to secure the pouch as quickly as possible after the fatal shot was fired. For, he reasoned, otherwise he had had ample opportunity to kill at long range.

OFF TO the right six crows flapped heavily over the forest and settled down out of sight. Crows meant human habitations or an excursion up the railroad track. In this instance Tangey knew the black fellows were following the track to pick up the corn and grain spilled from the passing freight cars. He could see several of the foragers perched on the uppermost tops of fir and spruce, standing in relief against the sullen sky like weathervanes carved from wood.

The sight inspired him to a new line of offense. He would abandon the trail and gain the track. Once he struck the well-scraped aisle between the steel rails he would remove his shoes and double his speed into 'Bamticook. And in a final sprint he cut across country.

The crows took flight with derisive cawing as he puffed up the bank and kicked off his shoes. He shook an angry fist at them, realizing they had betrayed his position to everyone within ear-shot. It required but a moment to sling his long shoes over his shoulder and start down the track on a run. He estimated an hour of fast work ought to bring him to the settlement.

On either hand the monotonous black-green growth pressed close to the railroad, extending upward and away as far as the eye could reach, unbroken save where a windfall occasionally presented an ugly picture of chaos. Excepting the soft *crunch, crunch* of his moccasins there was no sound to disturb the brooding quiet.

To his strained nerves the rapid thudding of his feet carried for miles in advertising his flight. It was not until he rounded a curve and made out a faint pencil of smoke far ahead that he experienced a great revulsion of feeling; his frozen dread thawed and broke up as wave after wave of hope surged over him and warmed him and assured him he had won the contest. He knew the smoke was too near to emanate from the settlement and he correctly decided it marked the fire of some section-gang at work on the track. Could he but reach them——

The detonation behind him seemed to fill and shatter the whole world. He went down in a heap, twitching and floundering until he rested on his back. He sensed no hurt but was stupidly amazed to find he could still hear and see. When he felt the terrific impact and numbing sensation in

Digitized by Google

his back he took it for granted he was dead.

So rapidly did his mind operate that by the time he struck the hard-packed snow prostrate, he had reviewed the whole day's battle and realized he had lost the race just as he was reaching safety. It impressed him as being the work of Fate. Then he remembered he had not eaten the lunch of bread and cheese in his right mackinaw pocket. He felt no fear, simply a dull wonderment that Ronco had dared to wait and pot him on the track. It savored of unnecessary publicity.

His flashing thoughts were halted as the bushes beside the track moved violently. He knew the breed was about to emerge into view. He was lying on his back, his rifle by his side, the muzzle pointing towards his feet. A pair of arms now appeared, one holding a rifle, and spread out to thrust back the underbrush.

Tangey's fingers mechanically tightened on the rifle barrel. He was mildly surprised to find he retained the sense of touch; theoretically his hands should be as numb as his back. Then as calmly as if shooting at a mark, with no feeling of revenge to dominate the act, he brought the butt of the rifle to his shoulder and lined the sights on the bowed figure. As he pulled the trigger he concluded the rifle did not make nearly as much noise as had the assassin's gun. This point troubled him so that for several moments he failed to see that the man had dropped in the snow.

"I ain't dead or going to die," he wildly whispered, choking back the mighty desire to proclaim his new belief in a wild shout. "I may be bleeding to death, but I ain't done for yet. No use sticking 'round here. I oughter make that smoke."

Wherewith he rolled over on his stomach and crawled to his feet. He now felt something hot and wet streaming down his side, yet it did not prevent his making down the track at a staggering run. He gave never a thought to the outstretched figure behind him.

Inside of a mile he met four men pumping a hand-car. Then he discovered he was very weak and accordingly sat down in the middle of the track. As the car halted he managed to explain who he was and what had happened.

The section-boss was essentially a man of action. Tangey had hardly finished announcing he was wounded before his makkinaw was off and the boss was examining his hurt.

"Bullet hit the framework of the shoes and glanced off, ripping yer side open somewhat cruel," he tersely informed. "Toss him onto the car, boys, and pump him into 'Bamticook in no time. Stop at the fire and tell the men to fetch up the other car. I'll go ahead and see how Jesse James is getting along."

"GOOD work, my boy," admired the agent of the branch office, as Tangey, escorted by a small body of citizens, entered the agent's home and explained the attempt at robbery. "I'll chuck the package in the safe here and send it into town tomorrow. I'm proud of you."

"Say, they're fetching the chap what took the shot at him," cried a townsman at the window.

"Well, if this ain't the limit!" yelped the agent.

The men and Tangey faced about to learn the cause of his concern. Tangey anxiously asked:

"Ain't the package in the pouch? Oh, don't say it got lost out. I seen it put in and the pouch was locked——"

"The package is here, sealed O. K.," barked the agent. "But what tomfoolery d'ye call this?" And he waved something contemptuously above his head. "Call this money? Here's nothing but tobacco coupons, almost enough to get a Morris chair, I guess."

"I don't understand," gasped Tangey. "I see Blisop put the money in the envelope and seal it up."

"Have the young feller step out here and identify this cuss afore we take him to the doctor's and then to the jail," bawled a voice from the street. "It's me, the sheriff, speaking."

Tangey still in a daze, stepped to the door and stared down on the muffled figure, groaning on the improvised stretcher. The sheriff pulled the high mackinaw collar away from the white face, and Tangey hoarsely exclaimed:

"Good Lawd! It ain't Ronco. It's Blisop, the agent!"

Digitized by Google

THE RESURRECTION PEDDLER

By Clinton H. Stagg

Author of "Peter Knowles Retires."

THE only living thing on Main Street was the bright green tuft of grass between the car-tracks in front of Mrs. Billy Shelby's boarding-house. The nearest thing to life was the violent vermillion paint that covered the front of Jerry Rogers' plumbing shop. It was noon in Medford.

The shiny black automobile with the brown leather trunk strapped on the rear of the car crept snail-like around the first corner to the right and turned into Main. The man at the wheel, whose sharp gray eyes peered over the thickness of a fifty-cent cigar at the road ahead, had instinctively throttled down when he entered the city of Medford. It was no place for speed.

Just past Mrs. Billy's boarding-house the driver stopped his machine in the middle of the street and puffed thoughtfully on his cigar while he looked around. On his left was a dingy brick building with wide brownstone steps and a square steeple. It also had a corner-stone. If there had been a trifle more look of life about that building the driver would have known immediately that it was an empty church waiting for Sunday to come. But his practised eye classified it at once. It was the City Hall.

The man in the car placed his thumb on a black button and announced his presence to Medford with a shrieking rattle of noise from his electric warning-horn. When his thumb got tired he removed it. Silence came once more. That was all that did come. A few more meditative puffs of the big cigar, a grunt, and the man climbed to the street.

"I'll have to see whether this is a joke or a bad dream," declared the stranger in the city.

He climbed up the steps and blinked in the dimness of the City Hall corridor. A door was open on his left and he walked toward it. Three tin letters, evenly separated by two old scars, gave their announcement to the waiting world:

M Y R.

"Ah," murmured the seeker of life. "The gaping office of his Honor, the Mayor. And somebody stole the vowels. Good sign. Theft is an evidence of enlightened progress."

A bald head that looked like a freak egg bobbed up from behind the high desk in a corner, as he entered the open door.

The visitor swept the cigar from his lips and the hat from his head with one grand gesture.

"Didn't you hear me ring?" he asked politely.

"Yeh," answered Baldhead complainingly. "It woke me right up."

"Oh," sorrowed the disturber of dreams, "I beg your pardon. But I merely wanted to find out whether or not a man might get a good meal near-by."

"I knowed you wanted something," yawned the man at the desk. "But there ain't nothing' in town so I knew there wasn't any use answerin'. Norton Junction is nine miles on."

"Do they bury 'em there?" the visitor wanted to know. "Or do they still haunt the old homesteads?"

Digitized by Google

Egghead squinted thoughtful for a few seconds. Then he decided that the smooth-looking stranger had insulted somebody or something.

"Norton Junction's a real live place," he averred. "They're havin' a open-air picture show over there today. That's where us folks went. It must be a great picture," he added wistfully. "Called 'Hearts Broken,' in three parts."

"Almost good enough to be fatal," nodded the intruder. He gazed over the dusty walls of the office and then let his gray eyes rest in polite question on the seated man. "The old love-and-duty stuff keeps you here, I presume?" he sympathized.

"Yeh," yawned Baldhead. "Bein' Mayor it's my duty to stay. It'd be just like that Overland Limited to be wrecked today."

"I beg pardon?"

The gray-eyed man so nearly gasped that the long white ash fell from his cigar. Then he controlled himself.

"Is it scheduled for a crash?" he asked interestedly.

"Well," hesitated the Mayor. "You can't never tell. Nobody ever thought it was goin' to happen nineteen years ago. But it did, and we made a barrel of money takin' care of people. I made forty-one dollars just myself. We'd have made more if we'd been expectin' it. But we won't be caught nappin' the next time!" He nodded his egg-head emphatically.

The man who wanted information took a cigar from his inside pocket and tendered it slowly.

"Have a smoke," he invited.

Any town that could hope for nineteen years that an Overland train could pick out its limits in which to be wrecked a second time was worth cultivating. A mile stretch of track in a route of three thousand seemed a pretty long shot. Patience like that should be rewarded. As a rewarder of patience the gray-eyed man was the one best bet.

The Mayor looked over the cigar critically, and the gold band pleased him. He lighted the perfecto. Then he pried a great silver watch from his pocket and squinted at the face.

"Sh!" he commanded. "Sh! Sh!"

The stranger obeyed the order and sh'ed agreeably.

In the distance a sharp locomotive whistle cut the silence. The weazened face of the Mayor took on a tense, expectant expression. That look had been on the faces of Medford residents for nineteen years. Another yelp of the whistle, much nearer this time. The Mayor had half risen from his chair and his head was bent forward. The distant rumble of the onrushing train came to the ears of the listening men. Then a third shriek of the whistle, fainter, farther away. The Mayor slumped back into his chair. A plaintive smile curved his thin lips.

"I'M THROUGH work now, for the day," he observed, and the wistful look came to his eyes once more. "I wisht I was as young as I used to be," he said slowly. "I could hoof it over in time to see them pictures. Ma took the wagon."

The stranger bit the end from a fresh cigar and held a lighted match for the Mayor.

"My car outside will have you over there in five minutes," he said. "Put on your hat."

"Land sakes!" gasped his Honor. "You mean that?"

He bobbed up like a jack-in-a-box and grabbed his hat from the wall.

"Hustling to broken hearts is the greatest little stunt I do," smiled the stranger. "I'm going to stay in this town a while. My name's Simpson. I'm a booster." He glanced at the lighted end of his cigar to see that it was burning evenly. "My specialty is train wrecks," he remarked off-handedly.

"Huh?" grunted the Mayor, and he stopped with one foot in the air. "You wreck trains?"

"Oh, no!" corrected Mr. Simpson. "My first name is Gerald. I just use train wrecks in my business. I'm a town booster. I peddle resurrection. How'd you like a train wreck every day?"

"It'd cut down prices," blinked his Honor seriously.

"Good!" nodded Mr. Simpson. "You've got the right idea. We'll only have 'em on Tuesday mornings. I'm going to like this place," he announced cheerily.

His Honor made no answer. He was still blinking as Gerald K. Simpson, of New York and other places, booster extraordinary, revivifier of dead towns, and general manager of live business, helped him into the car. The Mayor gasped a bit when the automobile jumped under him, and he

Digitized by Google

couldn't talk because he was moving faster than he had ever moved in his life.

"This is the way trains get wrecked, ain't it?" the Mayor finally managed to yell.

Mr. Simpson accommodatingly slowed down.

"Pardon me," he apologized. "You're working the other end of it, aren't you?"

They went along in silence for a few blocks. The houses were farther apart now and the tufts of grass between the car-tracks were greener and closer together. There probably weren't so many children to play on the car-tracks.

"Street cars gone to Norton Junction, too, I suppose?" queried Mr. Simpson, relieving his mind of the question that had been wrinkling his smooth white brow.

"No," the Mayor set right. "We ain't got no street-cars here. Jerry Rogers put down them tracks. He invented a unwreckable car. We was goin' to have 'em here, but the Overland thing came and we seen such a thing was flyin' in the face of Providence."

"Oh," murmured the enlightened Mr. Simpson. "Sort of kill-the-town graft, eh?"

The weazened little Mayor was absolutely serious about it, just as he had been about everything else. His Honor might have a nodding acquaintance with humor, but he took care not to get familiar with it.

"Jerry's kind of given up hope on that thing, I guess," remarked the Mayor. "He painted his plumbin' shop over last month, an' he's likely to go back to work again soon."

"After only trying nineteen years to sell an unwreckable car?" asked Mr. Simpson in mild surprise.

It seemed strange that an inhabitant of Medford should lose hope so easily. It almost savored of impatience.

"Jerry always did fly plumb off'n the handle if things went wrong," sighed the Mayor. "There's his shop over there."

He pointed a long, lean arm toward a low building on the left. The car-tracks curved from the street and into a great double-door. Mr. Simpson slowed down so that his keen eyes could read the weather-beaten sign over the door. The dull red letters said:

THE ROGERS UNWRECKABLE, SAFE,
SINGLE-TRACK TRANSIT SERVICE
Jeremiah Josiah Rogers, Pres.

At the side of the building, perched on an upturned keg, a shirt-sleeved man smoked a corn-cob pipe. The Mayor waved an arm. The seated man answered with a good-sized cloud of smoke from his lips. There was no other movement.

"Mr. Rogers looks tired," observed Gerald K. Simpson, as he added another notch of speed.

"I guess maybe he is," confirmed his Honor. "I been thinkin' of havin' my roof tinned for five years, an' when I told him the other day I might have it done soon he said he was inventin' a silencer for growin' corn. He said the cracklin' annoyed the residenters here. I guess that was one of his jokes, though. It never bothered me."

"Good night!" prayed Mr. Simpson silently.

He jumped the speed another notch. He wanted to hustle the Mayor to the "broken hearts" so that he might have a word or two with the one man in Medford who appeared capable of sarcasm. Jerry Rogers seemed to stand out from the rest of the community like a case of smallpox in an old ladies' home.

The Mayor of Medford lost himself in the sensations of being hurled toward the motion-picture show in the speedy black automobile. To the gray eyes of Gerald K. Simpson came a glitter. At last he had struck a town that needed his peculiar abilities as had no other town he had ever entered. Medford not only needed waking—it required exhuming. And that was a job after Mr. Simpson's own heart. The deeper they were buried the more fun there was resurrecting 'em. That was Mr. Simpson's idea, and he usually made it work.

When he saw people moving around the street Gerald K. knew that he was in Norton Junction and had left Medford behind.

"Is there a place where I can put up in Medford?" asked Simpson. "I intend to stay a few days."

"Mrs. Billy Shelby's got a boardin'-house," said the Mayor. "She boards the two school-teachers. It's a nice place. All the wreck people that was with her liked it fine. There's the show!" He stood up in the car and pointed excitedly down the street toward the open lot enclosed in canvas sides.

"I'll set you down at the entrance," agreed Mr. Simpson. "I may call for you in

Digitized by Google

a couple of hours. If I don't I'll see you back in town."

"Ain't you goin' to see the pictures?" squealed his Honor with dropping jaw.

"I've seen 'em a hundred times," lied Mr. Simpson easily. "I made 'em. Hope you enjoy the three parts."

As the Mayor stepped down he squinted at Mr. Simpson gravely.

"You look like a smart man," he declared.

"I am," corroborated Gerald K., as he backed his car from the gathering crowd. When he turned the car once more toward Medford he added a few words for his own benefit. "Lord knows, I'll have to be," he told himself.

The racing car ate up the miles at a rate that would have caused his Honor's poor old heart to stop.

Jerry Rogers was still in the same position on the upturned keg when Gerald K. drove the car to stop in front of him.

"I hear you've got an unwreckable street-car," was Mr. Simpson's pleasant greeting.

"Gossip travels fast, don't it?" asked the man on the keg, as he emptied his pipe against its side and took out a battered bag of tobacco. "I finished two of 'em in the Spring of '95. Have you heard we had a wreck here that Fall?"

"Yes," smiled Mr. Simpson, as he stretched the cramps from his leg muscles. He was going to like Jerry Rogers.

"You got all the news then." Jerry poked a wad of tobacco into his pipe.

"I'm interested in unwreckable cars," declared Gerald K. "Can I look them over?"

"The door's 'round on the other side," said Jerry. "The show's free."

There was no move to guide the visitor. There was no evidence of the usual inventor's enthusiasm. Mr. Rogers was busy with his pipe.

"Thanks," nodded Mr. Simpson politely and he walked around.

THE door was ajar and he entered the dimly-lighted shop. On the single track in the center an object loomed its bulk. Gerald K. waited patiently until his eyes became accustomed to the light. Then he gravely inspected the invention that had waited nineteen years for recognition.

At first Gerald had an idea the last high-ball had gone to his eyes. Then he saw that the fault was all Jerry's. At first there had only seemed one car, of a shape that would have brought sighs of ecstasy from Doré. Then Mr. Simpson saw that two cars, each shaped like something between a spider and a crab, were locked in a death-grapple.

When the eyes worked better it could be seen that one car had started to climb over the other and had stopped midway. And that was Jerry Rogers' unwreckable principle. Heavy tracks were bolted along the top of the cars, curving down in a sort of cow-catcher affair before and behind. When the cars met, one slid under the other. Which was subway and which was elevated was something the inventor would have to explain. To Mr. Simpson it looked like an even break.

"Unwreckable, all right," observed Mr. Simpson, "but hard on the strap-hangers of the car that starts to claw its way over."

He walked around to the front and for several minutes he gazed at them, head on. In the wildest periods of a rampant imagination Mr. Simpson had never conceived that such a weird looking thing could be made with cold, dull metal.

"Heaven help the little children and the early morning souses if they met one of those coming down the street," breathed Gerald, but his gray eyes were shining, his head was nodding, and an idea was tickling the roots of his hair. Medford was about to be lifted from the grave, brushed off, set on its feet and told to run away and play.

"I don't suppose he'd want a cent more than half a million," mused Gerald K. as he started out. "These inventors are such modest chaps."

But there was no trace of the thoughts on his face when he again stood before Jerry Rogers. Jerry stopped fumbling in his pockets and looked up.

"Great!" boomed Mr. Simpson in his biggest voice. "The best thing I ever saw. I want to buy it. What'll you take for everything?"

Jerry gazed out over the fields. Then his fingers tapped down the tobacco in the bowl of his pipe.

"I knew if I waited long enough somebody'd come along and offer me something for that plant and everything," he said slowly.

"By Jove, you were right!" exclaimed Mr. Simpson enthusiastically. "You've

Digitized by Google

waited nineteen years. Now what'll you take?"

Jerry rose. He gave the tobacco a final tamp

"Got a match?" he asked, and Mr. Simpson gave him one from his silver safe. Jerry pulled in a great mouthful of smoke, then carefully placed the burnt match in his vest pocket. "Thanks," he murmured, with the air of a man who has made a good bargain. "You'll find the key back of the door. You can lock the place when you're ready to leave. I'll go home and get you the patent papers."

II

MEDFORD was suffering from pains in the jaw. It had yawned three times. In a few days it would reach the point of stretching. For the first time in nineteen years an emotion almost akin to excitement had stirred three of the most susceptible residents of the place. Mrs. Billy Shelby had pinched her arm twice to assure herself that she was really awake. The Mayor's wife had insisted that the Mayor brush his official frock coat. The woman-intuition had told Mrs. Mayor that things were going to be doing in Medford.

Mrs. Billy Shelby's boarding-house had ceased its official existence. The morning after, Gerald K. Simpson had acquired full possession and all rights to the Rogers unwreckable car and plant for the sum of one match, and had rented Mrs. Billy's boarding-house for one year. In order to avoid haggling Gerald K. had sentenced Mrs. Shelby to life-long heart weakness by giving her five hundred dollars rent. He had also hired her at ten dollars a week to continue her management.

Jerry Rogers, who had proved his artistic ability by the vermilion front of his plumbing shop, had painted a sign that was to stretch across Mrs. Billy's house-front. It announced to the world the following:

UNION-TRANSCONTINNENTAL HOTEL
Single rooms $15 a day and up
Meals a la carte

Jerry had thrown in the extra "n" gratis, to prove that he was willing to earn the ten dollars Gerald K. had offered for the job. Jerry, his Honor, the four local aldermen, and the police force nailed the sign over the porch and stood in the middle of the car tracks to observe the result.

"It's a nice sign, ain't it?" admired the Mayor, speaking timidly to Mr. Simpson's fat cigar. The cigar waved up and down gently in answer.

The police force, who had been chosen for personal bravery, spoke directly to the gray-eyed man.

"That ain't the way to spell a dollar fifty," he criticized. "There ought to be a period and a capital nought."

The police force had almost been run down by an unwreckable car nineteen years before. He still jabbed at Jerry Rogers whenever he got a chance.

"Breakfast will cost that," scowled Mr. Simpson, walking over a few steps to see the sign from another angle.

"Nobody can't eat that much at one settin'," declared an alderman. He had taken several drinks and didn't care what happened.

The police force backed away a few steps and estimated Mr. Simpson's possible strength. He also contemplated an expenditure of fifteen cents for a new padlock for the jail door. He'd handled violent ones in his time.

Mr. Simpson walked majestically toward the next house and stood observing it gravely. He seemed to be marveling at the fact that it still held a vertical position. Then he turned on the alderman who had taken his drinks of courage.

"Your house, isn't it?" he asked, with a gesture of his fat cigar.

"Yes," resented the alderman, who sensed some sort of rebuke for its condition.

"I'd like to buy it," announced Mr. Simpson.

The alderman's eyes closed shrewdly. He hadn't taken too many drinks to side-step a business proposition. That house had cost eight hundred dollars to build nineteen years ago. This fool stranger would probably pay a thousand—cash. Dollar-fifty for breakfast!

"Well," hesitated the Medford solon. "It's the old homestead, an'——"

He stopped. Mr. Simpson's fat fingers were prying open the folds of his wallet. They brought to light three bills.

"Take twenty-five hundred?" he asked crisply.

The alderman knew that two of the bills were thousands because he had studied arithmetic. He also knew that it was daytime and that he was standing in the middle

Digitized by Google

of Main Street, Medford.

"Yes!" he gulped.

"Fix up the deed when you get time," remarked Gerald K., jamming the bills into the alderman's hand and turning his back so that he could look over the houses on the other side of the street.

The local police force, whose beard was waggling up and down as he tried to figure how much a straight-jacket would cost the town, put in a few friendly words.

"You could have bought my house for fifteen hundred. It's that green one over there with the blue blinds."

Gerald K. Simpson had been gazing at that color scheme with fascinated eyes. He turned in a most businesslike manner to face the police force.

"I never pay less than twenty-five hundred for a house!" he scorned. "I'm a booster. I practise what I preach. I show people how to boost their own stuff. Will you take two thousand and a half?"

The police force tried to answer, but the movements of Mr. Simpson's fingers hypnotized him. He reached the cataleptic stage when his hand closed over three crisp new bills.

Mrs. Billy Shelby appeared on the porch of the Union-Transcontinental Hotel and made motions with her lips. Mr. Simpson knew that she was calling him to breakfast. Mrs. Billy had not been able to speak above a whisper since she had put her five hundred dollar bill in the cracked tea-pot under the fourth board of the attic floor. She didn't want to wake herself up.

Gerald K. turned for a final word to the leading citizens of Medford.

"I'll want to get about ten more houses at the same price," he told them. "I like this town."

"Where does the line form?" asked Jerry Rogers without interest. He had no house, and the plumbing-shop market seemed slack.

"On the wallet side," grinned Gerald encouragingly. He liked Jerry, and was going to see that the inventor grabbed a bit of boost for himself. "See you after breakfast, at the City Hall," he dismissed them.

MR. SIMPSON climbed the porch of the newly christened Union-Transcontinental and threw away twenty cents worth of his fifty-cent cigar. Mrs. Billy tiptoed toward him softly. She always tiptoed. It had become a habit from attending her husbands' funerals.

"The school-teachers are cryin' because they can't afford to stay here now," whispered Mrs. Shelby. "They had their choice of the fifteen rooms——"

"Tell 'em I'd like to see 'em," murmured Mr. Simpson sympathetically.

"Yes, sir," promised the proprietoress of the U-T. "Your breakfast will be served in the—palm room."

Mr. Simpson's eyes brightened.

"Did you manage to locate a palm?" he asked happily.

"Mis' Hyson, the kindergarten teacher, made one out of some green paper," explained Mrs. Billy proudly.

"Debt number one for Miss Hyson," beamed Gerald K. "Tell her I pay on the nail!"

Mrs. Billy stole away. Gerald walked into the big back parlor and looked it over with approving eyes. Clean white curtains fluttered in the early morning breeze. The faded green carpet was positively shiny with much sweeping. The old-fashioned chairs glistened from hard rubbing. On a taborette beside the door a bright green-paper palm waved majestically above the brown jardiniere.

"Quiet, peace, joy!"

Mr. Simpson placed his hat reverently on a chair and sat down. On the floor above he heard excited whispers. Then Mrs. Billy fluttered in with his coffee and a plate of muffins. One sniff and one glance confirmed Jerry Rogers' statement that Mrs. Billy at least hadn't buried any starved or dyspeptic husbands.

"They'll be right down," confided Mrs. Shelby. "Will you have your eggs fried on the ham or alongside of it?"

"On," declared Gerald K. without hesitation, thankful to learn that a new dignity had been added to a fried egg.

When the sputtering crackle of the eggs sounded in the kitchen the two school-teachers entered the dining-room timidly. Mr. Simpson rose and bowed in his most courtly manner. One glance at their scrupulously neat persons, the much mended frocks, and the sad looks in their eyes made him glad that he was a booster.

"Mrs. Shelby tells me you're worried about a place to live?" he asked.

They nodded. The taller of the two answered:

Digitized by Google

"Yes. We've been here twelve years. There isn't another boarding-house in the town, and our pay isn't much."

"If we could have been left alone another year we'd have had enough saved for a little place of our own," quavered the second. "Wouldn't we, 'Delia?"

"Ah!" smiled Mr. Simpson. "A little home of your own. The dream of every woman. Had you decided on any place?"

The taller touched her lips with her handkerchief.

"Mr. Jepson said he'd sell us his place for six hundred dollars. And we could get the awful colors changed for twenty."

"Mr. Jepson's the local policeman, isn't he?" asked Gerald K., identifying the color-scheme immediately. It had been kind of Mr. Jepson to offer it for fifteen hundred to a perfect stranger.

"Yes. It's got a nice garden, and——"

Mr. Simpson held up a hand.

"It's a pretty little place," he confirmed. "I thought maybe you'd like it. I bought it this morning. The deed will be ready for you about noon. I'll get a painter on the job right away. How would gray and white suit you."

"Why—why——" faltered the nervous one. "We've only got four hundred——"

His uplifted hand once more interrupted.

"Use it to buy grass seed," he said. "The house is to pay you for the inconvenience of moving, also to boost the town's idea of proper exterior decoration. That's my business," he explained softly. "I'm a booster."

They gazed at him dully, unable to comprehend, knowing only that he had made some absolutely unbelievable statement.

"You don't mean—" began one.

"It can't be—" started the other.

"Payment for the palm," laughed Mr. Simpson with a wave of his arm toward it. "Wish you happiness, and you ought to make a tidy little home. Give me your full names for the joint deed."

They did, understanding at last that their dream had come true, and they left the room arm in arm, crying softly with the happiness that filled their hearts.

Gerald K. turned to the two eggs that showed golden and brown above the ham. "It's a fine old world at that," he murmured. "Let's see, fifteen rooms at fifteen dollars a day, meals ten dollars extra, twelve houses at twenty-five hundred apiece, an unwreckable car system, and an unbeatable boost system. Yes, the world meets with my approval."

Mrs. Billy Shelby slid softly into the palm room.

"Mr. Hawkins would like to see you a minute," she whispered.

"Mr. Hawkins," puzzled Gerald.

"He's our Mayor," explained Mrs. Shelby.

"Oh," smiled Mr. Simpson, glad to know his Honor's name. "Send him in."

The mayor entered timidly, his hat in his hand. His chin waved nervously for a second before it got the proper combination for words.

"Are we goin' to have that wreck soon?" he asked eagerly.

"You'll have a dozen here in a week!" promised Mr. Simpson grandly.

"Thanks," blinked the serious little man with the egg head. "I'll tell ma to get the cots ready."

III

GETTING together ten million dollars in your own name is an awful strain. Amassing a wad of money big enough to attract the attention of the newspaper cartoonists is a stunt that wears nerves to a frazzle. Being a multimillionaire is just one nervous shock after another. If it isn't the Federal courts it's the bright blackmailer who saw you dining with Tillie Truffle, the Folly Faerie. And if neither of those horn into your day's program Mrs. Multi-Mil will probably be worrying you to death because Mrs. H-Rival's pet monkey wears a ruby collar while you stick to the 1840 brand of stock. It's a hard life, anyway you take it.

Above, you have a few reasons for the Twenty-four Hour Rest Club. There were twenty-seven hundred other reasons but it is to be hoped that your sympathy is already aroused. We will now proceed to cudgel the cause of the hapless multimillionaire.

The Twenty-four Hour Rest Club was just what its name implied. It was a haven and heaven for harassed men of money. First on its roster was Cyrus Z. Jonathon, the crude-oil baron, who had managed to crowd into his seventy-one years of life a hundred and eighty-eight million dollars and a case of chronic gout. At the foot of the list was Gregory G. Gregory, worth a pitiful eighteen millions, which it was rumored he had acquired honestly. No one

Digitized by Google

in the club ever spoke to him. It was said that he loved his wife.

Hidden away on the quietest quiet street, between a cemetery and a hospital, the T-f. H. R. C. was a grave. Dues twenty-five hundred a year and private-stock whisky eighty cents a throw. The houses on each side had been purchased and filled with sound-deadening substances. The front door was four inches thick and used a quart of oil a week. The carpets reminded you of the days you used to hop around the bed when mother's feet hit the hall rug on the floor below. The lights were double-shaded, and all the books were bound in limp-leather silencers.

Cyrus Z. Jonathon wiggled a finger and three silent-footed servitors were instantly at his side to move his foot in a more comfortable position.

"Bad, today?" whispered Jason Calvin, who employed three doctors and a sanitarium to keep him out of the courts.

"Devilish!" moaned Cyrus. "A fool woman nearly ran under my motor in front of the Congress. Screamed! Nerves all twitching!"

"City's awful!" groaned T. Halliday Brundige, the ptomaine king whose canneries boiled the hearts out of fresh vegetables and little children. "Noise! Noise! Noise! Thank Heaven we have the club."

"Die without it," nodded S. H. Flaster, the man that took the eat out of wheat.

"I wish Gregory wouldn't drink highballs in the reading-room," complained the State Supreme Court, looking up from the papers on a case a rival had with his trust. "The ice clinks against the glass when he stirs it."

"Bar him!" snapped a man whom the public couldn't recognize from his published pictures because he didn't wear striped clothes. "This is the one place in the world where noise never comes."

That last sentence might have been the signal for nine nervous jumps and six outraged squeals. But it wasn't. The heavy front door had slammed in a way that jarred the whole club.

"Gimme a drink!" boomed a big voice that set teeth chattering. "Rye!"

A million twisted, snarled nerves started jumping at once. Somebody had pried open the grave! Men that demanded silence, peace, ease, as the very air they breathed, were being disturbed in their own club. It was unbelievable—unheard of!

Then a big figure loomed in the doorway, a figure in faultlessly cut gray. A figure whose lips held a fat cigar with a bright red band. In short it was a figure that cried aloud of life, and noise, and joyous abandon.

"Everybody have a drink!" commanded the big man. "Lord knows I need it. You need it. The world needs it. Gentlemen!" he bowed impressively toward them all. "You see a man who has been in the uncovered grave of the United States, the unroofed vault of the walking dead, the refuge of wraiths, and the home of specters, ghosts, shades who walk, breathe, talk, and are everything but human. Medford, gentlemen, Medford!" He turned to the petrified serving men who were huddled in a corner. "Hustle that drink!" he roared. "Whisky all 'round!"

He dropped into a chair with a crashing squeak of body and springs that brought T. Halliday Brundige to his feet with a shriek.

"Sick?" boomed the stranger in ready sympathy.

"My gracious, *yes!*" chattered Brundige. "That German scientist said the least excitement would kill me!" He pleaded with the others around the room for protection.

The State Supreme Court gulped down the remainder of the drink he had before him. He made his stiff eye-brows crackle impressively.

"Have you credentials entitling you to admittance in the Twenty-four Hour Rest Club?" he demanded harshly.

The big man looked at him pityingly.

"I'd have a fine chance prying my way in here with out 'em, wouldn't I? Here! I've only shown it five times already." He exhibited a card proudly. It had cost him three hundred dollars, paid in crisp new bills to the secretary of the club, who had a thirst for champagne. It was a visitor's limited membership. The forged scrawl of the vouching member was just a mess of tangled black lines. The secretary had been careful to form no letters. Thus he knew it would pass for the signature of any man in America who was worth ten millions or over.

The State Supreme Court squinted at it, and three other members leaned over for the inspection. Each knew that it looked as much like his own signature as it did like

Digitized by Google

any other member on the club's roster. But they also had a pauper member who drank clinky high-balls and was a goat.

"When did you get Gregory?" chorused three indignant silence-seekers.

"Is it a drink or a sentence?" blandly inquired the big man with the big voice.

"How did he happen to give you this card?" squeaked Jason Calvin, holding his heart to keep it inside his vest.

"Because I'm Gerald K. Simpson!" the big man applauded himself. "I'm a booster. I make a noise and show people I'm alive. I take the works out of dead towns and oil 'em. I make the wheels go 'round. I'm a resurrection peddler! Hustle that drink, you!"

He grabbed it from the tray of the automatic servitor. Then he sighed a huge sigh that brought fishy gasps from men who had paid the best doctors in the world to tell them that the least noise or excitement would kill them all. Gerald K. sighed again. After which he groaned. Then he drank his drink and emitted a roar of satisfaction.

"Yes!" he resumed his monologue. "I'm a booster. I hand a jolt of life to the dead ones. But Medford! Medford!" His voice rose to a snarling shout. "I was there two days! The population has been dead for nineteen years. There isn't a saloon or a store!

"Ever since 1895 the people have been waiting for another wreck to happen on the Overland tracks so they could make another forty-one dollars apiece taking care of the cut-up. That's all they think about, dream about. There isn't a trade, a bit of commerce. An automobile hasn't passed through the town in months. The Overland tracks are a mile away, and it's the nearest town for ten miles. It's the desert.

"They've got a hotel that hasn't had a guest for nineteen years. Good night! Please page one shot in the arm. Medford! Medford! Fifty-one miles away by automobile, in the southeast corner of Sayre County, and protected by the game laws. Good night!"

He looked around for the expected sympathy. Nothing but shattered nerves met his keen eyes. Cyrus Z. Jonathon chewed at the rim of his whisky-glass and spilled the liquor down his shirt front. He knew he was going to die before he beat the Interstate Commerce Commission.

Gerald K. Simpson's jaw dropped.

"For the love of Mike!" he howled. "Is this a morgue?"

"Oh, my Heaven!" moaned S. H. Flaster quaveringly.

Mr. Simpson jumped up with a sudden straightening of legs that sent his chair crashing against the paneled wall. Joyous satisfaction chased away the look of amazement that had brought the drooping jaw.

"This place needs me!" he announced. "I peddle resurrection! If ever a place needed a jolt of joy-juice over the heart this is it. Worse than Medford! Much worse!" He snapped out his card-case and looked once more at his card. "Got thirty days!" he beamed happily. "I'll be around every day to wake you up. You'll thank me. But I can't stand it today. Got to have a little life after that Med. thing. So long, people, see you tomorrow. Here, you!"

He tossed a ten dollar gold piece at the waiter and jammed his hat on his head. "Ruff! Ruff!" he growled, and his laugh rang out through the silence as they cowered in their chairs. The front door slammed. He was gone.

"Get Dr. Wellston!" fluttered Jason Calvin. "Quick!"

"He said he'd come back!" moaned Cyrus Z. Jonathon. "And his card will hold good according to the by-laws!"

"We can't come here for a month!" chattered the ptomaine king, who had fought and slashed his way past the thirty million mark, and was a helpless coward in the clutches of nerves.

"Gracious!" almost sobbed Mr. Flaster. "What will we do?"

The State Supreme Court licked his dry lips. "He said something about a town, a place——"

"It can't be true!" decided Jason Calvin hopelessly. "There's no place in the world like that. Think of that chateau I bought in Northern France. It's the first season I've missed it in years. The war! The club is the only place."

"And I bought a whole town in Alsace so that it would be quiet!" cried Mr. Brundige.

"If there was a place like that here—" gulped Cyrus Z. with human hope—"maybe—maybe—" he cursed softly as his foot twitched. "I'll have my secretaries look into it right away. Another minute of excitement like this will kill me."

"It would kill all of us," shivered the poor, pitiful multimillionaire members of the

Digitized by Google

Twenty-four Hour Rest Club. "If it is true! And a hotel without a guest for nineteen years! No automobiles! No trade! No commerce! Get our offices on the wire, John, quick! Make haste! He said he'd come back tomorrow!"

Yes, it's a hard life, anyway you take it.

IV

HOPE, and faith, and trust are wonderful things, but they had the shoulders of the Mayor of Medford flat on the mat while they giggled in his face. Mr. Hawkins was so gloomy it hurt. Every day for ten days his Honor had sighed in chorus with the faint, far-off whistle of the departing Overland as it hurried on toward the coast. For ten mornings straight Mr. Hawkins had carefully arranged six cots in the various rooms of his house. Each afternoon he piled them away again at the order of his wife. There had been no wreck.

Hope can be sustained and kept in its place when there is an indefiniteness about its conclusion. But the smart-looking stranger had made a definite, binding promise. He had stated clearly, and without reservation, that Medford would have a dozen wrecks within a week.

There were no wrecks. The stranger had vanished. The only thing Medford had was an additional population of twelve visitors who sat around the porch of the Union-Transcontinental Hotel and scowled when people tried to say good morning. They never seemed to talk to anybody. Mrs. Madden, who was helping Mrs. Billy in the kitchen, swore solemnly that each man paid two dollars for his breakfast, three dollars for his lunch and five dollars for his dinner. Of course this was a lie. They ate potatoes and meat and cabbage—just like anybody. They seemed happy, too, when they weren't scowling at people. This showed that Mrs. Madden didn't know what she was talking about.

The only other persons in town that seemed to be happy were the two schoolteachers who lived in that little gray and white house that used to be Joe Jepson's. The town police force was happy, too, but he was worried because there had been a lot more bills in the stranger's wallet. Ten other prominent citizens, who carried in their pockets copies of written promises to sell their homes to one Mr. Gerald K. Simpson for twenty-five hundred dollars within thirty days, were sorely puzzled. Also a bit hurt.

The lucky alderman who had received full payment flaunted his money disgustingly. And the ten others only had the fifty-dollar bills that had been given them for the papers.

The Mayor reached for his hat on the peg, and Jerry Rogers meandered into the office and looked around.

"Better wait a little while," he advised. "Mr. Simpson'll be here to see you in a little while."

"Did you hear from him?" asked the Mayor eagerly.

Jerry nodded and started to back out.

"What did he say?" queried his Honor, waving his chin to show that he was excited.

"Nothin'," answered Jerry laconically. "It was a telegram he sent."

Mr. Hawkins sighed deeply.

"You inventin' chaps never say anythin'," he complained. "What you an' Joe Jepson's boy been doin' out at your plant?"

"Getting things ready to start a car line here," frankly admitted the local inventor.

"I thought Mr. Simpson bought the plant an' the cars!" exclaimed his Honor, ready to nail the lie the minute it got in the open.

"He did," nodded Jerry. "He's paying me twenty dollars a day to overhaul it, and make the current connections with Norton Junction, so's my unwreckable cars can prove it."

"Twenty a *day!*" spluttered his Honor.

"Don't figure," helped Jerry. "It's a hundred and sixty a week. Double pay Sundays. Sure he's crazy. That's why we get along together."

The Mayor's overworked chin was having an awful time, and Jerry slid out before it began working again. When it did Mr. Hawkins started saying things to himself because he wanted a sympathetic audience. He was still talking when a familiar electric warning-horn jumped him out of his chair and to the City Hall steps.

"I knowed you wanted something this time," he confided when he was beside the shiny black car and reaching toward the fat cigar that had been waiting.

"Good!" congratulated Mr. Simpson. "It's a live mayor that knows its boss." He hopped down from the car and stretched luxuriously. "Any ordinance in this town

Digitized by Google

against the use of explosives and fireworks?" he wanted to know.

The Mayor shook his head vaguely.

"There used to be a lot of tree-stump blastin'. We couldn't make it against the law."

"Good! Twice in the same place! Got the deed all fixed for your house on my option?"

The Mayor had, and would the wreck take place tomorrow or the next day? Moving them cots was a pile of trouble.

Gerald K. gazed wonderingly at the egg-shaped head a moment, then he absently handed over another cigar.

"Go get your hat," he ordered. "Your ears'll get cold."

The Mayor scurried away to obey, and Mr. Simpson gazed up the street. On the porch of the Union-Transcontinental a knot of men were talking. They had been talking ever since that shiny black car had hustled into town at top speed. Mr. Simpson counted twelve. His data on the Twenty-four Hour Rest Club had been complete and correct. He looked at the little house with its new coat of gray and white. It certainly was restful to the eyes. Good investment!

Mr. Hawkins ran down the City Hall steps with his hat on his head and the deeds to his house in his hand. Mr. Simpson reached toward his inside pocket, then stopped.

"Save 'em till noon," he ordered. "I'll pay you all in a bunch. Now I want you to come down the street with me and point out the houses I bought. I forget which they were."

The little Mayor stared at him seriously.

"You must have a lot of money," he figured.

"Wads," nodded Gerald K., nodding to the village police force, and three of the alderman who had answered the call of the shiny black automobile.

One of the aldermen owned the house opposite the City Hall, and for several minutes after every one in the crowd had pointed it out, Gerald K. walked back and forth in front of it, studying it from every angle.

"Great!" he enthused. "Great." He turned to face the police force. "Want a job?" he asked snappily.

"Sure!" gulped the police force. He had heard about Jerry Rogers' pay. He didn't believe it, of course, but his official position demanded that he investigate.

"All right!" Gerald K. made that very familiar gesture toward his wallet. He took out a huge roll of bills. "I want to buy every window in town," he explained. "Get receipts for 'em, and all that's over belongs to you. Here's a thousand in little fellows."

"Windows?" gasped his Honor, squealing louder than the others.

"That's it," confirmed Mr. Simpson. "I'm collecting windows. I need 'em in my business. Which house is next on the list?"

They pointed it out—while the police force scuttled away with the thousand and a terrible load of responsibility. Mr. Simpson studied the second prospective purchase even more earnestly than he had the first. He asked a lot of questions about it, and every one pointed out its good points and told its history. The local citizens were working for the interest of Medford.

PROGRESS was slow down Main Street, but it gave the men on the porch of the Union-Transcontinental Hotel quite a while to puzzle the thing out. And it wasn't until Mr. Simpson had started looking over the alderman's house, for which he had paid, that the pert dapper-looking young man walked leisurely down the porch steps and came toward them. Mr. Simpson's data on the Twenty-four Hour Rest Club also included the young man. He was Cyrus Z. Jonathon's shock-absorber.

"Good morning," greeted the friendly young man, waiting politely until Mr. Simpson had been assured that the foundations of the house were quite firm.

Gerald K. turned his sharp eyes on the intruder and stared at him coldly.

"In business here?" asked the young man, not abashed.

"My own," squelched Mr. Simpson, taking care that the city officials should get his cue and scowl blackly at the inquisitive person.

"Ah," smiled the shrewd young man wisely. "I thought maybe you might be planning something that would interest the public. I'm a newspaper man."

The stranger had sized Mr. Simpson up as the kind of person who loved to talk to newspapermen. His idea was correct.

Mr. Simpson's face instantly beamed.

"Have a cigar!" he offered. "You look like a live one," he declared. "I expected to have a bunch of reporters here tomorrow or

Digitized by Google

next day. But enterprise like you've displayed deserves a beat."

At the promise of "a bunch of reporters" the young man's hand shook visibly. Newspaper men turned loose in a town that held twelve of the richest nervous men in the country!

"Real estate boom?" asked the questioner, choking back the shudder.

"Nix!" smiled Gerald K. tolerantly. "Moving pictures!"

"It doesn't seem possible—in this town," murmured the secretary.

Mr. Simpson grabbed him by the shoulder and headed him down the street.

"Look at those houses!' he commanded. "What do they remind you of? Where have you seen this street before?"

The seeker of information shook his head. His brain was too busy to waste time thinking answers.

"You don't know Europe," sighed the disappointed Mr. Simpson. "This street is the dead spit of the streets in the small Belgium towns. Put on a few dogs pulling milk carts, a pair of wooden shoes and a lace cap, and you'd swear you were looking in the geography. How's that for a set for a picture called 'The Nether Millstone?' "

The secretary's eyes narrowed.

"Property damage in a war picture will mount up," he warned a trifle coldly.

"Ha-ha!" laughed Mr. Simpson wholeheartedly. From his pocket he took five certified checks, each for twenty-five hundred dollars, and representing every cent Gerald K. had in the world. "I've paid cash for two houses. I'll own ten more here on the main street by noon. This picture's worth fifty thousand. No fake stuff goes. *I'm going to blow them up with dynamite!*"

The secretary staggered. Those checks had been held so there was no doubt of the genuineness. The secretary knew money when he saw it. But he was paid to keep nervous shocks from his employer.

"Have you counted on other property damage?" he snapped. "Broken windows, and——"

Mr. Simpson cut him short.

"My agent's buying every window in town," he informed.

"The town won't allow it!" declared the secretary desperately.

"No?" put in Gerald K. mildly. "There are three aldermen and the Mayor right here, ask them." He did it himself. "Would you rather sell your houses for twenty-five hundred apiece and witness the making of the greatest motion picture the world has ever seen, or try to beat those options of mine?" he demanded.

"I'd like to see the picture," averred his Honor eagerly. "That 'Hearts Broken' fil-um you made was a wonder."

Mr. Simpson had known that the Mayor's mind could be depended upon to work backward. It never worked the other way.

"Twenty-five hundred's a fair price," nodded an alderman, scowling at the butt-in who was trying to spoil real-estate values.

"That's bribery!" snapped the secretary, but he wasn't very brash about it. He'd handled town officials before, in his time. He also thought pretty seriously of the endorsement of a previous picture. Likewise of certified checks. "Bribery!" he repeated.

"Well," grinned Mr. Simpson insultingly, "you're no trust."

"You try that and you'll be sued for a million dollars!" warned the secretary, whose brain could no longer keep pace with his tongue.

"Good publicity," commended Gerald K. smilingly. Then he pointed toward the violent red front of Jerry Rogers' plumbing shop. "See that building? Tomorrow there'll be four hundred pounds of dynamite stored in it. Day after tomorrow the special train with two hundred actors, actresses and props will be here!" He turned his back squarely on the young man, and thumbed over the certified checks. "Here's yours."

He gave one to the Mayor, glanced over the deed that person gave him and thrust it in his pocket. There were four other deeds ready.

"Noon at the City Hall for the others," he ordered. "I'm going to take a little run to Norton Junction."

He bade the secretary a tolerant adieu and walked back to his machine alone. The check holders were all on their way to show their wives that it was true. In the shiny black car Mr. Simpson jabbed the button of his electric warning-horn so that the rattling shriek echoed from the heavens. He looked toward the Union-Transcontinental and smiled. A knot of men was around the nervous secretary. Mr. Simpson's imagination and his dope on the T-f. H. R. C. told him exactly what was going on. For instance:

Digitized by Google

"He's a blackmailer!" moaned the cannery king who paid nine attorneys to fight the child-labor laws. "He came to our club!"

"He's paying out a lot of money, and that seems to be his business," reminded the secretary. "He apparently discovered the town, because he told you about it. There's nothing wrong in him getting it for a picture of this kind. It's the one place in the country."

"We'll have to move again," stuttered Jason Calvin.

Cyrus Z. Jonathon dropped his chronic gout to the porch floor and howled with pain.

"We won't!" he snarled. "This is the one place on earth we can have quiet till the war is over and we can go back to Europe. I bought a whole town in Alsace to be quiet, and no whipper-snapper of a moving-picture man is going to drive me away. Think of this place! Woman don't talk above a whisper! Not a sound! Good food! Cheap! No, by the Lord Harry! How much does he want?" he demanded of the secretary.

"I didn't ask him," faltered that buffeter.

"Get him!" snarled Cyrus. "Here he comes now!"

Gerald K. had been puttering with his machine, but had fixed it, apparently, and was coming along slowly. The secretary ran out in the street.

"Well?" scowled Mr. Simpson as he stopped to avoid manslaughter.

"Come up to the hotel a minute, will you?" pleaded the private secretary, who knew his job depended upon it.

"You can't scare me!" scorned Gerald K.

"It's a business proposition," promised the secretary.

"Oh!" Mr. Simpson climbed down slowly. "That's my center name."

The multimillionaires eyed him coldly, and when he got on the top step he halted.

"Is this the bunch?" he demanded angrily of his guide. "Nothing doing!" he decided. "They cut me dead when I tried to be friendly!" He started down the steps, but Cyrus Z. Jonathon's voice halted him.

"How much will you take for the rights to that picture?"

"Not for sale!" ultimatumed Simpson.

"Then we'll hire the best lawyers in this country to keep your film out of every moving picture house in the United States!" decreed Mr. Flaster, the wheat king, who didn't believe in bread for the poor.

Simpson hesitated only a minute.

"Well, I'll have the fun of taking it, anyway," he challenged, but it could be seen he was thinking.

"We'll buy the property you purchased!" put in Halliday Brundige eagerly.

"All right!" snapped Mr. Simpson indignantly. "An honest man can't beat a bunch of crooks like you. I'll give you the deeds for six houses I've bought at five thousand apiece, and options on five more at twenty-five hundred."

"A hold-up!" snarled Cyrus Z. Jonathon wrathfully.

"Profit!" corrected Gerald K. quietly.

"Take your —— pictures!" snapped The State Supreme Court.

"Just as you say," nodded Mr. Simpson easily.

He turned to go down the steps. He stopped and gazed up the street, first one way, and then the other.

"Oh, my gracious! *Look!*" squealed Mr. Brundige, and they did.

COMING down Main Street were two things that even the wildest state of nerves had never shown the poor harassed multimillionaires before. They made their way slowly, clankingly. They looked like crabs. They looked like spiders. They looked like nothing on earth. But they were only Jerry Rogers' unwreckable cars, scheduled for a clinch in front of the Union-Transcontinental. Both had started at that second warning-horn signal.

Nearer—nearer—above the clanking and the rattle Gerald K. could hear Mr. Brundige's teeth chatter. He didn't wonder. In the shop Jerry's cars had looked like tamed rabbits compared to what they resembled as they crawled along the main street in broad daylight.

"Belgian armored tram-cars!" explained Mr. Simpson proudly. "Stood me in fifteen thousand. Watch 'em clinch!"

"Oh, my God!" moaned Cyrus Z. Jonathon.

It was too much. He dropped into a chair and his face was blue.

The cars met. For an instant they seemed to spar. Then the car with Jerry as pilot started to claw its way over the one run by Joe Jepson's boy. The cars might be unwreckable. But they didn't go about

Digitized by Google

it silently. The grinding of wheels, the shifting of gears, the raising of the cow-catcher effect on the car that climbed over the other would have made a German artilleryman faint. One car was on top of the other. It stopped.

"Hoo-ray!" yelled Jerry Rogers.

Then it slid down to the surface with a coasting crash. Both continued clankingly on their way.

Mrs. Billy fluttered out with water and they threw it on poor old Jonathon's face. His secretary, whose business it was to be a shock-absorber, had taken things into his own hands. He was writing out a check, and doing it with the speed of long practise.

"Six times five is thirty, five twenty-five hundreds, twelve thousand and a half. Fifteen thousand for the—*things*. Total, fifty-seven thousand, five hundred dollars."

He went to the side of his employer, who was gasping and choking. He put the fountain-pen into his hand.

"Sign," he murmured.

Cyrus Z. Jonathon, who had learned to obey orders when his face got blue, did so weakly but unmistakably.

"Endorse this!" said the careful secretary of Mr. Fraster and Mr. Brundige. They did. The secretary handed it to Gerald K.

"If you've killed him—" He ended the threat with a snap of his fingers.

"I haven't," murmured the unsympathetic Mr. Simpson, who had seen Jonathon's automobile refuse to respect women and children. "Good-by," he said politely, and he gave no thanks for the money he had taken from the millionaires.

Four blocks up Main he caught up with Jerry Rogers, and that smiling person stopped his unwreckable car. Gerald K. handed out a check. "Here's ten thousand," he explained. "I got fifteen. The check isn't good yet, but it will be as soon as my car eats up the miles to the bank. Willing to take a chance, aren't you?"

"Bet I am!" exclaimed Jerry, and there was a break in his voice. "I waited a long time to get something. I never expected to, and I was mighty glad to hand it all over for a burnt match. You're a white man, and I can be something now. God bless you!"

He turned away abruptly and busied himself with the car.

"Don't mention it," deprecated Mr. Simpson, embarrassed.

He turned his automobile, and started cityward, only to stop three blocks up when his Honor ran out to the street.

"You needn't mind about them wrecks," released Mr. Hawkins very seriously. "With this twenty-five hundred ma and me won't have to worry no more. Thanks." He looked up with that plaintive smile Mr. Simpson had first seen when the Mayor spoke of the pictures. "I guess a lot of people in Medford are feelin' thankful to you," he said.

"Good night!" muttered Gerald K. prayerfully, and he put on the last notch of speed to get out of town before any one else thanked him. Mr. Simpson was a very modest man.

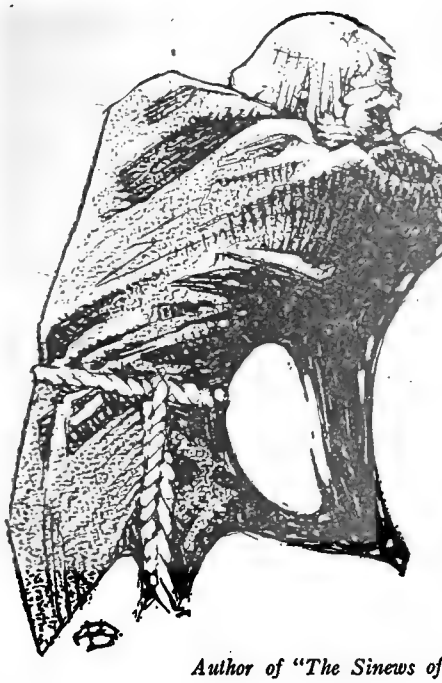
And on the high road, miles away, he slowed down. The old boosting smile came back.

"Pretty good," he murmured. "The two school-teachers have a home for life. Jerry Rogers has had his dream come true. Mrs. Billy Shelby will make a fortune on that bunch. Everybody in town has money, either for houses or windows that will never be broken."

The wide grin made his even, white teeth glisten in the morning light.

"And the poor wrecks of millionaires have found the one place on earth where they could be happy. It was worth every cent it cost them. I figure my commission, less expenses, at thirty-seven thousand. Boosting's a good game, a mighty good game! I'm a resurrection peddler!"

Digitized by Google



THE MONKS OF ST. METHODIUS

By Arthur D. Howden Smith

Author of "The Sinews of War," "The Man Who Could Not Die."

THE Abbot was very old. Once upon a time he had played his part on the stage that men call History, but those days were long since forgotten by him as well as by the rest of the world. He dwelt now in that vague realm of shadows created for the aged out of recollections of the past and hopes of the Heaven of the future.

And his recollections of the past were confined to the years he had spent sheltered within the monastery walls—first as novice, then as monk, then as Master of the Novices, then as Sub-Prior, Prior and, for fifteen years, Abbot, with all the powers, temporal and spiritual, of this exalted post. Thirty-five long, silent-passing years—years of personal immolation, of endless work and ascetic endeavor. The world that he had known before this was blotted from his memory.

Most of his time he spent nowadays in his stone-floored reception-chamber, sitting before the cumbersome reading-desk that supported his huge old copy of the Gospels, or else poring over some monkish dissertation upon obscure points of ecclesiastical polity. But, as was fitting his office, he led the brethren in all the masses and services in the chapel, and once a day, accompanied by his various officers, he walked through the endless rooms and corridors of the tremendous pile of buildings, from the cells of the lay brothers and novices and the high-vaulted kitchens, through which ran a stream of fresh water from a spring in the courtyard, to the guest-chambers, hard by St. Matthias's Gate, past which wound the road across the pass to the villages and towns in the plains below.

Beyond the gate he never went, however, and all he knew of the life that boiled outside was gained from the marvelous kaleidoscope that flowed by his window in the Abbot's Tower. This road started at Constantinople, slipped over the rolling Thracian plains to Adrianople, glanced off into the forest-clothed slopes of the Despoto Dagh, burrowed through them, climbed the heights of the Dobritza Pass under the shadow of the Monastery, and so gained Bulgaria, trailing in white loops and coils across the brown Balkan hills to Sofia, on into Servia, until at Belgrade it met the Danube's muddy current and stopped perforce, because Hadrian had never built a bridge.

It was a firm-bound road, somewhat crumbly as to ditching, but still hard under foot.

Over this road had flowed the tide of conquest ever since the Romans built it—from the Roman legionaries, Varangian Guards of corrupt Byzantium, down to the vast sweep of the Moslem wave, from the Bosporus to the gates of Vienna—then the gradual recession, and the slow recovery of Slavonic

Digitized by Google

Christendom, step by step. All these the road had known.

Time meant little to it—far less than to the Abbot.

And there was one other advantage which the road possessed over the Abbot. While he watched the people and caravans that passed St. Matthias's Gate from the detached height of his window, the road, despite its indifference, was in close touch with all the life that throbbed along its length. When men plotted war or great events were forward, the road always knew them far in advance, for among the myriads of men and women who plowed its dusty miles there was bound to be one who knew and must needs tell another.

Therefore, long before it had reached the ears of Cabinet Ministers, General Staff officers and Kings, the road had the rumor that the war eagles were on the wing; and the caravans increased their pace as they toiled past the monastery near the summit of the pass. An observant person would have noticed, too, that all the gipsies were heading north, up through Bulgaria and across the frontier into Roumania.

Your gipsy has no use for a land cumbered with trampling armies. His predatory opportunities are overwhelmed by sheer numbers. With the war clouds settling, Macedonia and Thrace were no places for the Tzigane tribes, and they hied to join their comrades of the Danube valley.

Men who traveled the road spoke together of border forays, of fights between blockhouse and blockhouse across the international boundary, of bands of *komitajis* gathering on the Bulgarian side of the line. But in the Monastery the same dull routine of prayers, services and daily tasks was pursued with never a wavering from the accepted rut. The Abbot was not an observant person.

Yet when disillusionment came a-tapping at his door, hand in hand with destiny, he showed that age had not corrupted the temper of his steel—this old man who had lagged a generation behind his time.

II

"COME in," the Abbot said.

It was a bright, warm day in the beginning of October. From the open window came the sound of padding hoofs, shuffling feet and men's voices, ringing with suppressed excitement—the noises of the road bestirring itself to redoubled activity under the lash of fear. Pomaks from the frontier villages were fleeing toward Adrianople, Seres and the shores of Marmora.

From the other direction came hordes of Bulgar peasants, whole families, young and old, household goods piled high on carts, live-stock driven alongside, donkeys and pack-ponies staggering under every bit of property that could be carried away—two gigantic migrations moving side by side in directly opposite directions.

Even the Abbot sensed a difference in the air, but he decided that it was only that the voices of the passers-by were louder than usual.

"Come in," he repeated.

The door opened, and the head of the gate-porter peered around it for an instant.

"A messenger from his Beatitude, your Holiness," he quavered, then bobbed his head and withdrew, holding the door wide open to permit the entrance of a tall young monk, who strode into the room with a curt bow.

"Greeting, my son," said the Abbot in his gentle old voice. "You bring me a message from his Beatitude the Exarch?"

The tall young monk bowed—profoundly, this time.

"It is here, Holiness," he answered, reaching into the folds of his long black robe. "I was ordered to hand it to you myself, and to satisfy your curiosity upon any points that may chance to be obscure."

As he spoke he extended the thin, sealed envelope to the Abbot, who first raised the seal to his lips, then slit the paper with a trembling forefinger.

The young monk watched him as he read. He was a curious type for a monk, this messenger. The lithe sturdiness of his limbs showed even through the baggy fulness of his robe, and his face was brown and clean-cut, with a certain ruthless force of will, instead of the pallid timidity of the cloister-bred man. Indeed, a curious young fellow, and anything save monkish—as had been the reflection of the gate-porter.

It was the Abbot who spoke first.

"But—but—this is extraordinary, most extraordinary, my son!" he exclaimed, glancing up over his horn spectacles. "Are you—have you—are you acquainted with the contents of this communication?"

Digitized by Google

"I do not know whether I am accurately informed concerning the contents, Holiness," replied the young monk dryly. "I have been instructed to make plain anything which you may not understand, however."

The Abbot rose slowly to his feet and paced over to the window which looked down upon the road.

"It is so strange—so very strange," he said, at last. "We are so quiet here. I can not think of our peace being broken. It seems inconceivable. War? Surely, that is a nightmare that has been laid!"

"If men say truth, reverend father, you, of all men, should know better than that," returned the young monk, a hidden vein of sarcasm in his tone.

"So," the Abbot said with ill-concealed pride, "that foolishness is not yet forgotten?

"Yet I had thought the world had grown better since my youth," he added wistfully.

"As for the world, I can not answer," replied the messenger in his curt, offhand manner—a soldier's manner, rather than a monk's. "But men are still men, and justice still rides beside the strongest armies."

"Yes, it is still the same," mused the Abbot. He turned from the window and walked back to his desk, hands twisted in the great string of beads belted about his waist. "But continue, my son, and pray be seated. It would seem that I am once again some manner of a soldier. Come! I await my orders."

"Concerning the exact terms of the message his Beatitude sends I am ignorant, Holiness," he said. "What I am charged to tell you is that war with Turkey may break out at any moment, perhaps tomorrow or the next day.

"Our plans are shaping rapidly. This is to be a war of Christians against Infidels, a war of the Cross against the Crescent, the last Crusade to sweep Islam out of Europe."

The young monk's voice rang with fanatical ardor.

"All the Christians of the Balkans will unite in this task. But the great task, the most honorable, has been entrusted to us Bulgars. It is we who are to open a way to Constantinople."

The Abbot leaned forward in his chair, drinking in every word.

"Now, to get to Constantinople, Holiness, it is necessary that we control all the passes," the messenger continued. "Also, we must fight quickly so that the Great Powers may not have an opportunity to intervene. We must clinch a victory right at the start. It is essential that we shall be able to seize the passes at a moment's notice. At all the ingresses chosen by our General Staff we are assured of success, except here—and here it is most necessary that we succeed, because this road allows us to flank Adrianople and threaten the Turks from the west. You see, Holiness? It is simple, when you come to consider a minute. While we hold the Turks in play on their front, we can pour masses of men through the Dobritza Pass and smash their flank."

The Abbot nodded.

"I see," he said. "It is a good war plan—simple and good. And we of St. Methodius——"

"The Monastery of St. Methodius is the key to Dobritza Pass," returned the young monk solemnly. "We ask this of you, Holiness—only this: Keep your monastery free of Turks until this time a week from today, at the outside. We will aid you. I have rifles and dynamite in my carts below, and troops will be sent to your help at the first hostile move."

"But of what use are dynamite and rifles to decrepit old men?" asked the Abbot with a faint smile.

"They are better than nothing, Father," returned the young monk. "And a very little heavy firing will serve to give the warning to us across the pass."

Again the Abbot rose and strode thoughtfully across the room to the window that looked down upon the road. Below him the two columns of fear-smitten human beings toiled endlessly in opposite directions. And his heart ached for them, for the hardships that he realized must be in store, if not already begun, for Turk and Christian alike.

"War!" he repeated slowly. "Well, let it come. We are old men here, but we will do our best for the cause and the Cross."

The messenger rose to go.

"I am sure you will," he ventured. "In the Military Academy at Sofia they still tell the boys how you took your division of artillery across this same pass in the depth of Winter, before even a diligence road had been built."

But if the Abbot heard he gave no sign. He stood immersed in thought by the

Digitized by Google

window, staring down at a little brown baby, perched on top of a pile of household gear in a rickety cart. The baby was laughing.

III

THAT night the road blazed with camp-fires. The tang of the wood smoke blew in through the Abbot's window like memories from the past. And all of the next day the migration continued, and the day after that. But the third night there were no bivouacs on the road. A whisper stole through the dust from caravan to caravan that men who would reach safety must hurry.

Men trembled as they exchanged the news that great armies were already afoot. It did not seem possible. But rumor grew to a whisper and the whisper to an accepted fact—war.

Then blind panic gripped the wayfarers on the road, and from his window the Abbot, who had become an interested spectator of the folk migration which was denuding the country, looked down on men and women who cast their most cherished belongings into the ditches to make their flight swifter. They would not stay to eat or drink, or sleep. They fled, pursued by the fear of the unknown rather than by any tangible specter. Turk and Bulgar, Moslem and Christian, all shared the same plight.

After that last night of restless flight, the sun rose on a scene of pastoral calm.

The road was deserted. The only traces of the columns which had traversed it were the impedimenta thrown aside by fugitives in their panic, and the tail end of a Pomak caravan disappearing into the defiles of the Despoto Dagh on the other side of the valley.

For the rest, the road was barren of human company on this splendid October day, and the Abbot wondered thereat, reflecting, as he thumbed the rosary that belted his waist, that despite the stirring scenes staged for his little community in the past few days, they had yet to see a soldier. In this backwash of war might it not be possible for a community like the monks of St. Methodius to pass unnoticed? He sighed at the thought, but almost at once his lips snapped shut in a hair-wire line.

What was that fast-moving dot just emerging from the trees behind which the tail end of the Pomak caravan had disappeared? No cavalcade of loose-jointed Moslem mountaineers ever moved at such a pace, not even with arrant panic to spur them on. The Abbot stared long and hard. His eyes were better than those of most men at his age; but the dot on the road was still a long way off. Instinct, however, prompted him that it was composed of men on horseback. The Abbot pondered a moment, after the fashion of men who have outgrown the habit of making quick decisions, and then clapped his hands for the lay brother in attendance in the anteroom.

"Bid Brother Ivan the Little come to me," he said, when the lay brother opened the door.

Five minutes later Brother Ivan the Little, a rotund, merry-faced man who was Sub-Prior—the office of Prior being vacant at that time—panted into the room.

"You sent for me, Venerability?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the Abbot. "What did you do with the guns and dynamite the messenger left with us?"

"They were placed in the Crypt of the Abbots under the chapel, Holiness," answered Brother Ivan the Little.

"Good," said the Abbot. "That is a safe place. Now, my son, do me the favor of looking down into the valley below—no, along the line of the road. See, beyond the river—that——"

"It is men on horses," exclaimed the Sub-Prior. "Men on horses, with long sticks in their hands."

"Lancers!" The Abbot felt a quiver run through his old body which he knew was not rheumatism. "That would be Turkish cavalry, my son. We must be prepared. Tell Brother Peter, the gate-porter, that he is to keep the gate locked and let nobody through without my order, and when the Turks ride up, if they ask admission, he is to call me at once."

Brother Ivan bobbed his head and withdrew.

As the morning passed, the horsemen steadily drew nearer. They were riding at a fast trot and gallop, alternately, and by noon they were scaling the lowermost heights to the tableland upon which the monastery was perched in the side of the shouldering hills. The Abbot had no trouble in distinguishing them now. There

Digitized by Google

were some twenty in all—Turkish lancers, probably of the Imperial Guard Cavalry.

At the foot of the ascent they slowed their horses to a walk, but before they had gained the level ground in front of the monastery they began to trot again. They drew up in front of the gate in a billowing cloud of dust out of which shone the burnished points of the lances, pennons fluttering gaily, and the officer in command, a slim-faced, hawk-nosed man, advanced and thumped the wicket with his saber hilt.

Presently Brother Peter the gate-porter stumbled into the Abbot's chamber, in his excitement forgetting entirely to wait until he was spoken to.

"Oh — oh — Holiness," he stuttered. "There is an *askare* captain at the gate who wishes speech with you."

"Tell him I will come down directly," replied the Abbot. "And on your way tell Brother Ivan the Little—but no matter. I will see him myself."

In the lower cloisters the Abbot called Brother Ivan to him, and whispered something in his ear.

"But the arms!" protested Brother Ivan.

"You will not need them," said the Abbot calmly. "Do as I say, and all will be well."

And without another word he walked on after the gate-porter.

The gate of St. Methodius was in reality a double door, two heavy wings of massive timbers bolted together. Set into the right wing was a smaller door, and shoulder-high in this wicket was an open space through which the monks might talk with persons outside.

At sight of the Abbot's face in this opening the officer smiled kindly and saluted.

"A thousand pardons for intruding upon you, Holiness," he exclaimed in broken Bulgarian. "I am instructed to patrol this neighborhood to look out for *komitajis* and other trouble-makers, and I must ask permission to go through your monastery."

Innocent surprise was expressed upon the Abbot's face.

"But, sir," he faltered, "these are very dangerous times to open our gates to strange armed men. All the countryside has been fleeing from we know not what, and now you ask——"

"Have no fear, Father," replied the Turk, readily, "I do not mean to bring all my troop clattering into your monastery. Admit two of my men and myself, and I will send the rest to eat their lunch in the shade of the wall. Come! It is only a matter of form, this search, and I have no wish to inconvenience you. So large a building in such a critical position, however, must be carefully reconnoitered."

"If such are your orders you must obey them," returned the Abbot, "and you seem a kindly young man. Enter."

He motioned to Brother Peter to unbar the small wicket, and himself stepped to one side. Stooping his tall figure to get through the cramped doorway, the officer, followed by two of his lean troopers, climbed in. He removed his fez at once and bowed low to the Abbot.

"Your own countrymen are to thank for this visit, Holiness," he stated apologetically.

Through the cloisters, up-stairs past rows and corridors of cells and offices, into the suites of guest-chambers, his own reception-chamber and narrow bedroom beyond, winding in and out of the hundreds of rooms that went to make up the vast monastery, the Abbot led the Turk. After a few dozen rooms had been inspected, the officer grew weary of his task and merely glanced at a door when it was shown to him.

"And now," remarked the Abbot, after they had been walking nearly an hour, "we are coming to the kitchens and storerooms.

He paused in front of a heavy iron door set deep in the wall.

"The entrance to the principal storeroom," he explained.

The lay brother, who attended them with a great jingling bunch of keys suspended from his girdle, fumbled nervously with the lock and finally pulled the door open. With the same perfunctory curiosity he had shown before, the officer glanced across the threshold. But before he had really glimpsed the dim interior, he heard a sudden rush of sandal-shod feet, felt the breath knocked out of his body as one of his own troopers was flung headlong into the small of his back, and sprawled head over heels across the room, his two men on top of him. Before any of the three could regain his feet, the heavy door clanged shut and was locked with an audible creaking of bolts.

Outside a little knot of monks and lay brothers stood panting about the Abbot. Exertion of this kind was not in their line, but the faces of all were flushed with

Digitized by Google

satisfaction over the praise they received for their conduct.

"And now we must take care of the soldiers outside," concluded the Abbot. "Brother Ivan the Little will go to the wicket and tell them that their commander will stay to lunch with me and their comrades will be looked after in the kitchen. As they are Turks, they will not question the dispensations of Allah."

IV

THE *askare* sergeant to whom Brother Ivan gave the Abbot's message simply nodded his head.

"But might there perhaps be a little soup for those by the roadside?" he suggested with the childish frankness of the Turk.

"I will see," said Brother Ivan, and he went straightway to the Abbot.

"Certainly," commanded the Abbot. "Take him a kettle from the kitchens."

And presently two lusty lay brothers swung open the wicket and handed out a boiling caldron of soup, which the sergeant and one of his men gratefully took in charge. Although the *askares* did not know it, both those lay brothers carried automatic pistols under their robes, and half a dozen trembling monks with magazine rifles were lined up just inside the gate. But it was impossible at that distance for the Turks to hear the bellowed shouts and curses of their comrades, who beat upon the iron door of the storeroom and tried to forget the folly of shrieking for help through stone walls three feet thick.

For the rest of the afternoon the lancers lounged around their horses and slept under the trees across the road. In the monastery the monks guarded every window and doorway, almost as much afraid of the wicked short-barreled Männlichers they carried as of the enemy without. Toward evening the sergeant crossed over to the wicket again and knocked timidly.

"I don't like to bother you, *Papa*," he apologized to Brother Peter the porter, "but I wish you would find out from my officer what he wants me to do about supper for the men."

Brother Peter went in search of the Abbot, who sent down Brother Ivan the Little to smooth over the situation.

"Well, what is it, my man?" demanded Brother Ivan, whose rosy face was very stern.

"I want to know what my officer wishes me to do about camping," said the *askare* politely—for, contrary to general opinion, all Turkish *nizams*, or regulars, are instinctively courteous. "Will your Holiness ask him for me?"

"I can't bother your officer now," said Brother Ivan. "He's busy."

"Ah!" said the sergeant thoughtfully. "Has he been drinking again, *Papa?*"

"Does he drink very often?" countered Brother Ivan. "Isn't he a good Turk?"

"Like a fish, Holiness," replied the *askare* simply. "Oh, yes, I dare say he is as good a Turk as the rest of us."

"Well, he is a very good Turk tonight, *askare*," said Brother Ivan with a smile. "He couldn't possibly come down to speak with you."

"In that case, I had better tell the men to make camp and forage," remarked the sergeant. "Will you report to my officer what I have done—when he is sober?"

"Gladly," answered Brother Ivan with a chuckle.

The sergeant went away, and a few minutes later he and his comrades across the road began to kindle fires and pitch little shelter-tents under the trees.

Meantime an agitated conference was in progress in the Abbot's chamber. It was all very well to hold off the soldiers for a few hours, but when morning came they would be inclined to doubt any additional explanations of their commander's continued absence.

"We must get a messenger across the pass," was the Abbot's final decision. "If it is true that war has begun, then the Bulgarian General can send us help."

"But who is to go?" asked one of the older monks. "We are none of us young, and——"

"Hark!" ejaculated Brother Ivan the Little.

He raised his hand, and the circle of old men leaned forward in their straight-backed chairs, straining to hear what he had heard through the deathly stillness of the monastery. And all of them heard it, heard it distinctly—the far-off murmur of many men moving along the road.

From the window nothing was to be seen except the camp-fires of the detachment of lancers glowing on the opposite side of the

Digitized by Google

road. It was a black night and starless and out of the bowels of its blackness the thudding shuffle of hundreds of feet and the vague, indescribable noise which a mass of men can make without talking, came to their ears like the century-passing echoes of some army of the dead.

"What can it be?" chattered the old monk who had spoken before.

"They are coming from the south," mused Brother Ivan.

"*Askares*," said the Abbot quietly. "There are many of them, too. This time, I think——"

He broke off as a splotch of light daubed the blackness of the road in front of the monastery. It was one of the lancers waving a torch, sweeping it in circles and half-circles, in straight flashes, now up, now down. Almost instantly he was answered from a point down the hillside by a swinging lantern which checked off the dots and dashes of the Morse code in patches of light.

In the window high up in St. Matthias's Tower the Abbot and his monks watched and waited, while the torch whirled and darted this way and that, and the lantern flashed back from below, and the shuffling feet drew nearer. It seemed almost no time at all to the watchers in the window until a dark mass, darker than the night itself, loomed up in the dim white track of the road. The lancers lighted more torches and rode forward to meet it—strange, ghostly figures in the flickering light, which played in turn upon the sloping rifle-barrels of a seemingly endless column, which stretched off into the gloom-wrapped distance.

"I think we shall have another visit," remarked the Abbot. "Brother Ivan, please see that all the brethren are warned."

The torches flared beneath as he spoke, and a little squad of horsemen rode up to the gate. *Rap-rap*, went a saber-hilt on the wicket, and then came the mutter of conversation. But still the Abbot made no move. Sitting motionless by the window, looking out over the darkness which shrouded this mysterious road, he thought of another night, a generation gone by, when he, too, had marched over the pass in a howling snowstorm, without a guide and without the loss of a gun. It had been a long time since he had thought of that night, but it did not seem as far away now as it might have seemed any time the previous thirty-five years.

The summons of the gate-porter disturbed his memories, and for the second time in that eventful day he walked down to the entrance of the monastery, beyond which he had not set foot since he entered it nearly thirty-five years before. It was dark in the courtyard. The only light was a lantern which Brother Peter was careful to hold so that its rays might not show through the spyhole in the wicket.

Outside, the tall torches held high by the Turkish horsemen cast a puzzling network of shadows around the officers who had come demanding admission. At first the Abbot was unable to discern anything. But as his eyes accustomed themselves to the unnatural light, he described a group of fez-topped men, wrapped in long cloaks, who sat their tired horses in a half circle about the gate.

One man sat prominently in front of the others—a short, thick-set man, who cursed softly under his breath.

"What do you wish, *askares?*" said the Abbot, after a brief survey of the situation.

The Turkish leader started at the voice coming unexpectedly from the blank wall of the gate, but instantly recovered himself.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"I am the Abbot of this holy place."

The Turk nodded shortly.

"Ah, is that so? Well, *Papa*, I hear that you have some lancers in there, and I am obliged to trouble you to admit some of my men, too. We are camping here tonight, and your monastery is large enough to hold a battalion besides yourselves."

"But who are you, Effendi?" countered the Abbot.

The Turk turned to an orderly behind him.

"Tell Bimbashi Halil Bey to bring up his battalion. He is to garrison this place."

Having despatched this order, the Turk turned his attention again to his interrogator.

"I AM Hafiz Bey," he answered curtly, "Colonel of the 147th Infantry of the Line. Kindly open your gate so that my men may march in. Come, come, *Papa*—don't be so pig-headed. You Bulgars never learn sense. It is war, my friend, war. Soldiers can not be trifled with in time of war. They take what they can get. Open your gate. My commissary

Digitized by Google

officer will give you vouchers for any damage or expense you sustain."

"But—but—I do not like this coming of armed men into our monastery."

The Abbot was fighting for time.

"Once before today we were visited by *askares*. Why should——"

A bugle shrilled in the velvety depths of the night, and the remorseless tramp, tramp, tramp of feet again approached the monastery.

"You are wasting my time," returned the Turkish commander impatiently. "Come, now, *Papa*, I am tired, my men are tired. We wish rest. Open your gate, or I will break it down."

The Abbot slipped back to whisper a command to a monk.

"I am very sorry, Effendi," he said courteously, "but I can not admit you to our monastery at this hour of the night. It is most irregular; I am surprised that you should request it. War or no war, the extra-territoriality of religious buildings is an understood thing."

"Bulgar pig! Blockhead!" roared the Colonel. "You shall have a lesson. Ho, Bimbashi! Break in that gate with your advance company. Smartly, children!"

The Abbot stepped aside from the wicket.

"Now!" he cried.

One after another, two strong young lay brothers from the kitchen staff stepped to the spyhole and hurled the dynamite bombs they had been taught to handle. The stunning concussions followed each other so closely that they almost seemed one. And on top of them came a sustained crackle of rifle fire from all the windows of the monastery commanding the gate.

The head of the Turkish column was blown to atoms. Hafiz Bey had his horse killed under him; most of his staff were dead. The Turks broke and fled. And as they ran they filled the night with the panic cry that again and again has paralyzed Turkish camps in Macedonia:

"*Komitajis!* It is the *komitajis!* Run, comrades, run!"

It was all Hafiz Bey and his officers could do to restrain them from running away *en masse*. For fifteen minutes the officers used the flats of their swords and physical violence to get the men back into line. By that time some sort of order had been restored, and the fire from the monastery had died down.

"Allah curse them!" swore the Turkish commander. "It was a trap, a bare-faced trap. I might have known these Bulgar swine would be up to something like that. For this we will burn every man we find alive."

In the monastery the little company of monks and lay brothers gathered trembling around the indomitable figure of their Abbot.

"Be of easy minds and joyful in your hearts, my brothers," he begged. "It is not often that we of the Church can strike a blow at once for the Cross and our country. Besides, what is it that we shall have to do at most? Stay safe behind stone walls until help comes from across the frontier. It is little enough, but let us try to show that we appreciate the honor that has been given us."

The tension relaxed noticeably, and the monks dispersed to various stations. Some of the older ones were told to lie down and snatch a little sleep, while the rest sought windows and stations on the roofs that gave them a view of the ground approaching the walls. The monastery had become a miniature fortalice, girdled with steel—aye twice girdled with steel, for beyond the walls the darkness began to be pricked by tiny flashes of flame, as the Turkish sharpshooters fired and the smacking reports of their Mausers stirred up the silent echoes of the surrounding hills.

Mountain after mountain caught up the ripple and crash and roll and rhythmic discord of the rifle fire and tossed the war song farther and farther, so that in the dead of the night, shepherds on far-off moorlands, miles away across the Dobritza Pass, heard the reproductions of the savage clamor and ran to tell others that there was fighting along the road beyond the Rhodopes.

Miles and miles and miles the stirring echoes carried, and soldiers who heard them smiled and pushed on faster toward the deaths that awaited them, and fugitives paled with greater fear and increased the pace that would lead them out of the conflicting range of the giant armies that followed the inevitable line of the road.

V

HAD Hafiz Bey known that he was facing some seventy or eighty monks and servants, most of whom were handling firearms for the first time in their

Digitized by Google

lives, he would have rushed the monastery during the night and probably won it at comparatively small cost. He labored under the delusion that he faced an ambuscade of *chetniks*, the dreaded *komitajis* of the secret revolutionary organization, who were more to be feared than Bulgarian regular troops in such warfare.

Therefore Hafiz Bey established a cordon of pickets and concentrated his reserve battalions at convenient points around the monastery, as he had been taught to do at Potsdam, and sent back to division headquarters at Arnautkeng, nearly twenty-five miles away, for artillery, while his sharpshooters harassed the defenders. In this he was but obeying the letter of his orders. He had been instructed to proceed along the road and seize all positions of strength upon the Turkish side of the Dobritza Pass, and hold them, sending back for supports in case he should be attacked.

When morning came the Turkish commander was able to get a better idea of his situation. He had become suspicious during the night that his foes might not be as dangerous as he had feared, when the *coup* at the gateway was not followed by some equally daring attempt to demoralize his men. By daylight his suspicions were confirmed. But now it was too late to brush aside the monastery's defense in one dash.

During the night the Abbot had made use of the cover of darkness to strengthen the weak points of his defense. None of the monastery windows was very wide, but all had been barricaded, and the gate had been made secure against anything except explosives.

However, Hafiz Bey belonged to the younger generation of Turkish officers, and he was not disposed to believe himself beaten until he had exhausted every resource he could command. And since the monks were not particularly accurate marksmen, he threw forward his men in a series of careful charges in the early morning twilight that gave him possession of several commanding positions from which he could do much to control the monastery's fire.

From these positions the courtyard and roofs were entirely exposed, while it was possible for the Turkish infantry to maintain such a fire against the windows of the big building that the attention of the defenders was diverted from any movement toward the walls. By these tactics Hafiz Bey succeeded in getting a considerable force of men safely entrenched near the monastery before noon, all ready for an attempt to carry the St. Matthias Gate.

The monks were not ignorant of his intentions. The Abbot caught the drift of the Turkish attack long before its actual strategy developed. He knew intuitively that this was the logical thing for Hafiz Bey to do. But all he could do to guard against its success was to husband his ammunition and keep his limited supply of men from exposing and over-tiring themselves. Many of the monks were over sixty years old, and even a wiry man of sixty, used to a simple life and diet, gets lame under the unaccustomed kicking of a high-powered rifle-butt.

This was partly the reason for the lassitude of the monastery's reply to the *askares'* fire. The main reason, of course, was that the superior numbers of the Turks gave them actual fire control. Despite the care the Abbot used in sheltering his monks, several were hit during the night and early morning, and that meant so many less to face the general assualt.

The Abbot sat in front of his reading-desk, but his eyes looked at the dissertation of Brother Lazarus without reading it. His thoughts were all of the burning present, chased with fleeting recollections of the past.

If he only had the fiery youth of the messenger who had brought the Exarch's warning—and with that thought his mind snapped back to vivid wrestling with the problem that confronted him. If help did not come soon it would come too late.

And upon the heels of this realization came again the leaden feeling of age, of utter weariness, tinged with a creeping sense of the uselessness of it all.

"I am an old man," said the Abbot to himself, "an old man, and nobody remembers who I am. Stay, though. That messenger called me Highness. Perhaps——"

Brother Ivan the Little bustled into the room, rifle slung over his shoulder, his face streaked with powder-stains.

"They are coming, Holiness!" he exclaimed. "We can see them running across the fields, beyond the kitchen-garden."

The Abbot shrugged his shoulders and stood up. Outside, the firing swelled to a continuous roar, then gradually dropped off and was succeeded by the distant cheering of the Turks as they charged.

Digitized by Google

"Everything has been arranged for that I can think of," said the Abbot. "Bid the brothers with the bombs come in here also."

Brother Ivan went away to execute this command, and the Abbot walked slowly to the window over the gate, standing a little to one side out of the direct line of fire. In a patch of woodland across the road he could see men advancing, the sunlight shining on their bayonets.

Otherwise the landscape was as peaceful and deserted as usual. The air had the snap and zest of early Autumn. Yet all around him men were trying to kill each other—for what?

He was aroused by the entrance of a file of monks, who deposited their round black dynamite bombs in a neat row under the window, then sat on the floor and waited.

The cheering grew louder. Suddenly, from a far corner of the monastery came the *rip-r-rr-rrr-rip* of a volley. Out of a depression on the opposite side of the road leaped a line of men, bending close to the ground as they ran. Guns began to go off all around him; the men in the room with him were firing from the windows flanking the one at which he stood, and presently he choked with the dank, acrid fumes of burned powder and gases.

Outside there was no smoke to obscure the view. The men who had leaped forward across the road were still advancing, now and then, stopping to fire. Behind them emerged a second line, and finally a third. As one advanced the others fired. They did it with machine-like regularity for several hundred yards. Then the advanced line swayed in toward the center, displaying a tendency to bunch, and broke at a mad run for the gate.

Men dropped every minute, even under the unskilful fire of the monks, but they kept on, the rest of their comrades after them. Almost before the Abbot realized it, the space in front of the gate was clogged with screaming *askares* who clawed and battered at it or shot their rifles into the tough wood.

Then an explosion shook the tower, and another and another in quick succession fairly jarred the stones from their courses. The Abbot dimly perceived that the monks in the room with him were dropping dynamite bombs into the mass of Turks in front of the gate. He wondered if these bombs would not do more harm to the building than to its assailants, but it was too late to speak now. The damage had been done, and as he peered out of the window, he saw the ground littered with sprawling bodies and the *askares* retiring, firing as they ran.

It was over. The first attack had been made, and had failed.

But the cost had been frightful. *Papa* Ivan, Brother Peter the gate-porter, and the elders of the little community who came to the Abbot's chamber showed their fear in their faces. More than twenty monks were dead or wounded, and the gate had been so torn by the dynamite blasts that it tottered on its hinges. Another charge could not fail to carry it.

The Abbot listened to all and spoke a few words of sympathy.

"We are not at the end of our rope, yet, brothers," he said. "There is still the church."

As in most Balkan monasteries, the chapel of St. Methodius was built in the wide courtyard at one end—a separate building, independent of all the structures around it, and as massive in its architecture as St. Matthias's Tower itself, the foundations of which, according to some stories, had been laid by the Romans.

"It will be some time before the *askares* attack again," continued the Abbot. "In the meantime, brothers, rest and eat. When the attack comes we will hold them off as long as may be, but at the last we will retreat to the church. There we can hold out until help comes—if it does not come before."

VI

THE wave of *askares* checked, then gathered impetus and surged on. They seemed to be coming from all directions, a sifting, swift-moving line of men far too numerous to feel the sting of the few rifles left in the monastery.

They did not pause at the gate. A solid mass of men rushed it like a battering-ram and swept it from its hinges. But behind the gate they encountered a rude barricade of wreckage and paving-stones lined with rifle barrels, and over them the dynamite bombs burst with appalling force, throwing savage splinters of stone in every direction.

Again a check, but this time the billows of Turkish bayonets rolled backward, not very far, but still they rolled backward, out

Digitized by Google

through the shattered gateway. The monks of St. Methodius, a bare handful now, blood-stained, powder-blackened men in torn robes, leaned on their rifles and wondered dully what would happen next. They felt that they had reached the end of their resources. Already the Turks were sending a ragged stream of bullets through the gateway, preparatory to another rush.

None of those on the barricade was disposed to dispute when Brother Ivan the Little dodged into their midst and ordered them to fall back to the chapel.

"But the Abbot?" asked one of the younger monks.

"He is there," answered the Sub-Prior. "Run through the cloisters, brothers, and you will not be so exposed."

In the chapel, large as many a metropolitan church, and blazing with the barbaric magnificence of Byzantine architecture, the little knot of monks and lay brothers gathered behind the débris of furniture which had been heaped against the doors.

The Abbot was praying before the high altar. He did not turn around, even when the first adventurous Turks dashed through the gateway to find the barricade undefended, and split right and left into the shelter of the cloisters; and the monks were too much occupied to pay any attention to their Abbot. Instead of prayers they thought only of their rifles, and hoped that the breech-blocks would not jam.

Strategically the garrison of the chapel had the *askares* at a disadvantage, for they were able to maintain a raking fire upon the gateway. But in the meantime the *askares* had gained access to the buildings at other points, and from the upper stories of the cloisters that ran around the courtyard, three tiers high, they poured a vicious fire into the stained-glass windows which formed most of the eastern wall of the chapel above the altar and were scattered thickly along the sides.

Three times the monks checked a rush with their diminishing stock of bombs, but after the third time all knew the end was at hand. The sun shone through the splintered windows upon the rich carving of walls and screens, playing over the gaudily embroidered icons and the statues in the niches. On the steps of the high altar the Abbot had prostrated himself in the posture of adoration and supplication.

"He is praying hard," murmured a monk.

"We need his prayers," was the grim answer of Brother Peter the porter.

"One more bomb and twenty-seven cartridges," said Brother Ivan the Little, returning at this moment from a hasty summary of the garrison's ammunition. "But what is the matter? The *askares* have stopped shooting."

As if in answer to his question, a Turkish bugle blew shrill and clear, and was answered by another and another, hysterically insistent. And then the bugles were drowned by a furious burst of firing outside the monastery walls. Louder and louder it swelled, drumming and crackling with the crescendo volume of thousands of rifles, like some great pipe-organ of war.

Through the loopholes in the chapel door the monks could see the *askares* who had occupied the cloisters running out of the gateway, and still the firing increased.

In less time than it took them to realize it, quiet had settled down upon the monastery. The uproar and confusion of the fighting outside only accentuated the sudden peace which had returned to the bloody vistas of the cloisters where for so many generations monks had sat and meditated, with never a thought of the wars that stormed up and down the road.

"I must see what this means," said Brother Ivan at last; and he unbarred the door.

As he slipped out, he was followed one by one by the dozen monks who could still walk. But the Abbot did not stir from his prayers, and in their excitement the others forgot to call to him. They ran through the courtyard, carpeted with dead *askares*, out past the shambles of the gateway, and stood in the ruins about the foot of St. Matthias's Tower.

It was mid-afternoon, and the day was very fair. Across the hills over toward Bulgaria stretched long lines of men in brown uniforms, advancing at a run, and the road leading down from the pass was also clogged with dense brown columns. Below, in the valley, the *askares* were retreating in disordered masses, their flanks drawn in before the enveloping movements of the men on the hillside who threatened to shut off their escape into the Despoto Dagh.

The monks sat down contentedly upon the ruins of the gateway, like tired men who have done their day's work, and waited. They were still sitting there when a

Digitized by Google

company of mounted officers rode along the road and halted in front of the monastery to watch a couple of guns unlimber to shell the fleeing *askares*. When the gunners had established the range, the horsemen rode up to the gateway, and two of them dismounted and picked their way through the ruins to where the tired monks sat on blackened stones and timbers.

"You do not remember me?" said the youngest of the two officers to Brother Peter the porter.

Brother Peter looked at him and started. It was the young monk who had brought the message to the Abbot.

"Yes, I remember you, *guspodine*," he said. "You see, we kept the *askares* out."

The young officer nodded.

"Where is the Abbot?" he asked.

"He is in the chapel," answered Brother Peter. "This is Brother Ivan, the Sub-Prior."

"With your permission, *Papa* Ivan, we will seek his Holiness," said the young officer.

The older officer with him, a gray-bearded, hawk-eyed man of near sixty, who had not said a word all this time, followed in silence through the courtyard. When they entered the chapel the Abbot was still lying in the same position of prayer.

"That is strange," exclaimed Brother Ivan. "I have never known him to pray so long."

The older officer murmured something to the younger, and after crossing himself started toward the altar.

"I am General Savoff," he said shortly. "I think you need a doctor here."

"A doctor?" protested Brother Ivan.

"Yes," answered the older officer. "See!" He gently raised one of the Abbot's hands, that were clasped before him on the altar steps, and let it fall.

"His Holiness is dead," he said.

The two officers carefully lifted the body of the old priest and laid it upon its back. The face was very calm and still, and at sight of it the man who called himself Savoff, Generalissimo of the armies of the Bulgarian Czar, gave an involuntary start of surprise.

"Yes," he muttered, "it is he."

"Did your Excellency know our Abbot?" asked Brother Ivan in some surprise.

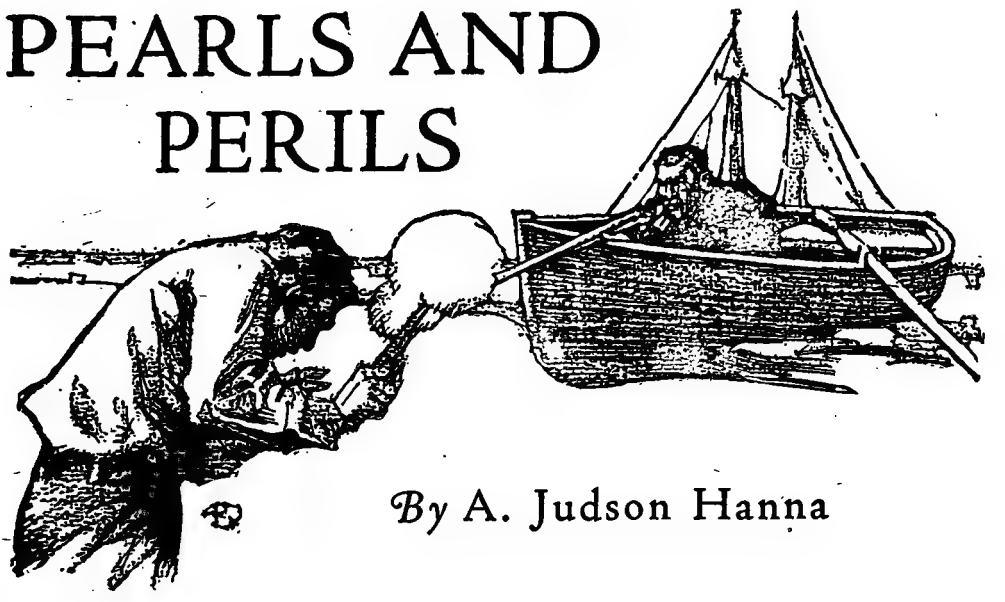
"Only as a young man has known and revered a hero," answered Savoff simply. "Your Abbot, *Papa*, was Prince Paul Radkovich, General of Division of the Russian Army, who forced the Dobritza Pass in '78. All Bulgarians have loved him, because, although he won fame and honor under the Russian Czar, he came back to help us in the time of our national rebirth. He has died as he lived."

ALL the rest of that day and night the Bulgarian columns poured over the road past the Monastery of St. Methodius, flinging themselves like a gigantic thunderbolt upon the flank of the Turkish army on the opposite side of the Despoto Dagh. And from his resting-place in the chapel, the dead Abbot passed them in review.

To him, perhaps, they were no more real or vital than the countless legions which had preceded them, triumphant in victory or reeling in defeat. But as each regiment passed the monastery gate, its colors were lowered and the men ported their arms, in salute to the memory of the man who had held open the Dobritza Pass for their passage.

Digitized by Google

PEARLS AND PERILS



By A. Judson Hanna

BELIEVE me, there is not one caper in the whole list of impertinences that an equinoctial gale forgets when it starts in to liven up things on Little Fisher, three degrees south of the Line. It had poured all day—a solid, drab blanket of rain that turned into vapor as it struck the warm earth, and sent up clouds of steam from the little pools in the rocks along tide-line. The wind was one continuous roar, so steady that it bent the palms at right angles and held them in that position as rigidly as if they had been nailed there.

I had been drowned out of my tent and had sought refuge at the company's store, where I found conditions only one degree less evil than in the open. The wind rocked the flimsy bamboo structure till I feared its instant demolition, and snatched at the roof with its stark fingers, opening up undreamed-of seams through which the water poured like tea from a spout.

I was in bad sorts all around, and the storm did not comfort me. To begin with, I had a whale of a cold. My head was drumming an accompaniment to the roar of the wind, and I was half blind because of the quinine I had dosed myself with on account of the cold. To improve my eyesight, I took counsel with a bottle of McVickers'—the agent's—white whisky. And, lastly, I still owed four hundred dollars on the schooner. I had it to get by the fifteenth of the month, or give her up.

It was now the third, and my prospect of raising four hundred dollars in twelve days was about as bright as it was of listening to grand opera that night, which was nil. Captain Jake, at New Hope, had sent word that he could use me and the boat for a few days with handsome profit to myself, if I got over there at once. But there was no going to sea in such weather.

To cap it all, Rawson—I had seen him that morning—had told me that Van Pelt was on the island, looking to charter a boat. He had warned me not to let mine go too cheaply, hinting that Van Pelt was about to cut loose on an enterprise which would, if successful, make a rich man of him, and could afford to pay well for the use of the *Lazy Lou*. It was now long after lamplight, and Van Pelt had not looked me up.

That meant he did not intend to. White men do not go about the island after dark, if they can avoid it. It meant, too, that he had picked up a boat elsewhere. I was disgruntled. I had never liked the man, but I owed him that four hundred, and why had he not come to me direct for a boat, and turned the use of it over on our account?

My eyesight was improving rapidly. One more consultation, I thought, would set it right, and I was measuring out the drink when the door banged open. I rose

Digitized by Google

impatiently to close it, thinking the wind had burst it in, when I saw Van Pelt standing inside, in dripping oilskins.

"One rotten night!" he said dispassionately, throwing off the oilskins and sitting down opposite me. "Where is Mac? Oh, never mind," noticing the bottle. "I wanted a slug, that's all."

He took two of them, without a pause.

"I want the *Lazy Lou*," he said, settling back.

I looked at him curiously. He spoke as if the schooner were already his again.

"Charter?" I asked.

"Yes," he said.

I shook my head.

"I go with her. I don't want a crew of islanders messing up her deck and cabins."

"Don't mistake me," he said hurriedly. "There are no islanders going on this trip."

Then he caught himself and shut up.

"Then how will you manage?" I asked.

"I'll *manage* her," he answered confidently. "Come now, two hundred a week, for two weeks—maybe three. What do you say?"

"Not without me."

"You are —— independent. Do you recollect——" he began, and broke off.

"Of course," he added sneeringly, "I could wait until the fifteenth and take the schooner free."

"Wait, then," I growled, and rose as if to go.

As I say, I did not like the man, and his habit of speech was anything but conciliatory. And I was in a mood to thwart him.

"Come back! Don't be an ass," he said uncivilly. "I can't afford to wait. What are your terms?"

"An equal share of what you get," I answered, staring at him coolly.

"Rawson told you!" he fairly bellowed.

"Rawson? What does he know? He didn't tell me."

He looked at me keenly for a minute, trying to surprise the lie in my eyes; then poured another drink, but held it in his hand, thinking.

"See here, Sanger," he said resignedly, "I know it is a waste of time to talk to you when you have got that infernal will of yours set against anything. But I trust you, even while I deplore your pigheadedness. I'll show my hand.

"I've got to have a sailing-boat quick. Rawson knows about it. I had to let him in because he is the only man around this forsaken place with the ready money, and I've got to outfit. You will make three, and I'll get only a third, whereas I ought to have it all."

I should have been warned by his ready acceptance of my profit-sharing proposal; but I never was remarked for shrewdness.

"Get to it," I said.

He set down his glass and went on—

"Somewhere, not more than six hundred miles from here, there are a hundred thousand dollars' worth of pearls."

"GOOD night," I said.

"Oh, sit down!" he exclaimed angrily. "Do you think Rawson would advance money on a mere speculation? It's as sure as anything is. Here's the lay. You know my hangout—Bottle Island. Well, a week ago today my boys picked up a native outrigger with a man in it, just outside the lagoon. He was unconscious, nearly dead. I got him to bed and shot some drinks into him, and after a while he came around.

"I asked him how he happened to be in the boat adrift. He answered, 'They—I'll get them yet, for this.' That was all he would say till three nights later, just before he died. Then he asked me to do something for him, partly to avenge a wrong he had suffered, and partly to reward myself for the attentions I had shown him.

"This is his story. He and two other men had been down in the Ton Ton Straits, pearl-fishing, for eighteen months—new bed that no one else knew about. When they had cleaned up about forty thousand apiece, they decided to come north and cash in. On the way up they were wrecked on an island, but got ashore with the pearls and some provisions.

"They were on the island six weeks, building a boat. There are only six or eight families of natives there, with no craft but small proas. While they were at work on the boat, my man—Farrold, he called himself—became suspicious of the other two. They had their heads together all the time, hatching up a plot, as he thought, to get rid of him and make off with his share of the pearls.

"To nullify any crooked work on their part, he took *all* the pearls from the tin cracker-box which held them, substituted

Digitized by Google

some pebbles, and rewrapped it. A morning or two later he awoke to find that his comrades had vamosed with the boat and the tin box. He stayed on at the island, hoping that a ship would happen along and take him off. Finally, when his supplies ran low, and the lonesomeness of the place began to work on him, he determined to set out for himself.

"He bought an outrigger from the natives, provisioned it, and started north. That is about all he remembered till he awoke in my shack. The pearls he left behind, wrapped in a strip of blanket, and hidden in a stone wall, fearing that something might happen to him and the boat. If he lived, he expected to return, of course, for them. He told me precisely where they are. They are any man's property, but you see why haste is necessary. If those two men survived the sea, they will be back in a flash when they open the tin box and find out how they've been bamboozled."

"Where is the island?" I asked.

"Farrold didn't know the name of it, but I do. As soon as he mentioned the stone wall, I knew it for Okuku. There isn't another island with such a wall from here to Pago-Pago. It is a relic of Portuguese occupation."

I had Van Pelt eating out of my hand, but I determined to oppose him, point by point, until he was ready to agree to anything in order to win my coöperation.

"It sounds good except for one thing," I said. "Why did this Farrold leave the pearls behind him? If he took them with him, and got to safety, well and good. But if he were to drown, what difference would it make to him whether the pearls went to the bottom with him or not?"

Van Pelt said:

"Probably it was his natural disinclination to risk such a fortune in the uncertainties of his trip. But whatever his reasons were, his story is straight enough. Do you think a dying man would concoct a tale like that and palm it off on a friend who had done everything in his power to make his last moments comfortable?"

"One other thing," I said. "How about the ethics of the case? Two-thirds of the pearls belong to the other men."

"Ethics go hang!" he retorted. "If you are so —— scrupulous, you can take the dead man's third. Rawson and I are not so blooming conscientious that we would balk at trimming those swine. Think what they did to Farrold! How soon can you get the *Lazy Lou* ready?"

"One moment," I delayed. "I understand I am to have a third share of the pearls, if we find them. In case we do not, what? Captain Jake wants me over at New Hope."

"You'll have to take your chances, like Rawson and me. I haven't any money to reimburse you."

"If we fail, will you make over the *Lazy Lou* to me?" That staggered him for a minute, but he finally agreed to the proposal.

"I'll get Rawson to witness to the paper," I said. "And I'll have the schooner ready before this storm goes down. But I'll need rigging."

"That's all right," he returned with evident satisfaction. "I've got some advance money from Rawson for provisioning and whatever extras you will need for the schooner. Give me a list first thing in the morning."

When he was gone, I took off my sodden shoes and hose, stowed them behind the counter, rolled up my trousers above my knees, and slipping a poncho over my head, stepped out into the gale. Late as it was, I was determined to see Rawson.

The sky was sooty black, and I might as well have been without eyes for any use they were to me. Bracing my back against the wind, I felt for the path with my toes. When I reached Rawson's shack, I found it dark. I pounded on the door, but the storm drowned my noise. The door was unfastened, and I pushed in, fumbled on his smoking-table for matches, and struck a light.

As the match flared up I saw Rawson standing in his pajamas with a revolver pointed at my face. I dropped to my knees, the match went out, and I shouted—

"Don't shoot!"

"I won't," he said, coming forward and lighting the lamp. "What's up?"

I got into a chair, saying:

"Van Pelt has been to see me. He told me everything and says you have joined hands with him. That so?"

"I don't like the expression," Rawson said, and I stared at him. "You won't understand that, of course, but I agreed to stake him, and I am going to Okuku."

Digitized by Google

"You hate the man worse than I do. Why did you do it?"

"I don't know. He is so plausible, —— him! And I ought to kill him."

"Instead of which you plan to put yourself in his company for two, perhaps three weeks," I remarked.

"Perhaps I want to watch him," he suggested.

"Steve," I said, "I believe you knew him before you came here."

"I did, worse luck! Knew him down in Auckland. Hang it! I might as well tell you. He stole from me the only woman I ever cared about, and then—flung her aside."

"He did that, and you didn't——"

I paused amazed, knowing somewhat of Rawson's spleen.

"You think I ought to have killed him. I thought so, too, once. I used to get out my revolver and clean it, and load it, and promise myself that I would shoot him on sight. But I never did. What satisfaction is there in killing a man? You can't gloat over a dead thing. And if I *had* killed him, I would have been haled into court, in all probability, and have saved my neck only by explaining everything and bringing *her* into it. I always thought he lied to her about me. If I were sure ——"

He broke off, and tapped the revolver with his forefinger.

I went to bed in Rawson's shack, turning over in my mind what he had said about Van Pelt and the girl. At that moment his revelations seemed of vastly more importance than the pearls themselves. I was surprised that he had discussed the matter with such candor. It was unlike him. Perhaps he wished to put me on my guard.

"All the makings of a first-class tragedy on board the *Lazy Lou*. I must watch them," I muttered, and fell asleep.

WE LEFT Little Fisher two mornings later in the tail of the storm. Van Pelt would have no blacks aboard, and it was only by sharp work that we were able to make out—one man at the wheel, two to handle the canvas. Van Pelt alone, with his huge strength, was worth two ordinary seamen.

But the trouble I had feared was not long in coming. While I was in the galley on the second day out, being chef as well as captain, I heard angry voices and quick steps across the deck. I dropped the fish I was scaling, drew my revolver, and stepped into the runway with my arms folded. Van Pelt and Rawson did not notice me at once. The latter was backed up against the rail with one hand behind him fumbling at the rack for a spike. Van Pelt stood with legs wide apart, one hand on the wheel, and a sneer on his handsome face.

"Drop it!" I said curtly. "What has got into you two men? If there is any more of this nonsense, I'll put about and run for Little Fisher."

"The deuce you will!" growled Van Pelt, turning his attention to me. "I'll let you know I'm running this ship."

"Think again, Van Pelt," I said cheerfully. "I am in command here, and you are taking orders from me. Now put the schooner on her course. She is luffing." He looked quickly at the mainsail and gave the wheel a couple of turns. "We are partners," he snapped, "and I'll take orders from none."

I stepped closer and shoved the barrel of the revolver over the crook of my left elbow till its evil eye stared him in the face.

"Van Pelt," I said slowly, "I am responsible for this ship and the safety of all aboard of her. If you refuse duty, I'll shoot you, same's I would a mutinous black. It is scarcely necessary for me to remind you that we are short-handed, owing to your silly prejudice against taking a crew, and every man of us is needed to navigate the lugger. If you refuse to obey my orders I might as well shoot you now and heave you overboard. Rawson and I would never have time to bother with you if I merely put you in irons."

It was a bold bluff, and I half expected that he would call it; but I knew the question of authority must be settled, willy-nilly, at once. I had noticed on coming on deck that the schooner was carrying more sail than was prudent under the conditions.

"*Captain* Sanger is right," said Van Pelt with one of his sudden changes of front. I never could understand his swift transitions from surly defiance to extreme civility. He seemed to me to have two personalities, the better of which he kept secure in the background most of the time. "The captain is right," he repeated, with a disarming smile. "I apologize for the scene, and promise that it will not be repeated."

I turned to Rawson.

Digitized by Google

"I'll be good, captain," he said whimsically.

"Now then, take in that topsail," I ordered, "and hereafter when sail is made, it will be at my directions—not otherwise."

"But——" Van Pelt began.

"No 'buts.' Get forward!" I said, and took the wheel.

After that everybody was as pleasant as a gorged hog, particularly so after what happened a few hours later. But always thereafter Van Pelt addressed me with studied formality as "Captain" Sanger. He had never bothered to use the title before.

Having eaten dinner, I was at the wheel. Rawson, who had cleaned up the dishes and kettles, was smoking amidships. Whatever Van Pelt was doing in the bow I could not see. The sea was going down, but every now and then one of those huge, sudden waves that travel in the wake of a gale smashed obliquely against the schooner's bow, jarring her from truck to keel, and flinging cascades of water over her forecastle head. Later I learned that Van Pelt had been leaning with his back well over the rail and had failed to see one of the big ones rolling toward him. So when it rammed the bow, he was catapulted backward into old Pacific.

The first I knew of his silly predicament was when I heard Rawson's "Man overboard!" and saw him running aft with a coil of rope. He took the poop stairs at a bound, winding an end of the rope around his hand as he ran. Pitching the coil at my head, he dove over the rail. I kicked the coil apart till I found the other end, and lashed the wheel with a few turns of it.

When I looked for Rawson and Van Pelt, I saw them bobbing along through the smother at the end of the rope. Van Pelt, who was no swimmer, was making sorry work of it, floundering now on his stomach, now on his back, and blowing water like a whale. But the strong tug of the schooner kept their heads pretty generally above the waves.

I began hauling in and after some minutes of strenuous work had them on deck again. Van Pelt went below at once to get into dry clothes, while Rawson sat down near me and seemed half ashamed of his exploit. I laughed outright.

"Well," I said, "what made you do that?"

"Impulse. When I saw him go over, I forgot what he had done to me. He was a human being in peril of his life, and I did the only natural thing. If I had had time to consider the matter——" he added with a malicious grin.

"Which proves," I observed, "that it is better to follow instinct than to wait for mature judgment."

"Oh, come, now," he protested, "I think mature judgment would have dictated exactly what I did."

I was curious to see how Van Pelt would meet Rawson after his rescue. Rawson dreaded the meeting—I knew it from his frequent, uneasy glances toward the hatch. He feared, doubtless, that Van Pelt would embarrass him with effusive thanks; possibly offer him his hand.

But when Van Pelt came on deck, he hardly noticed Rawson, but began chaffing me good-naturedly for not coming about and lowering a quarter boat in seamanlike manner, instead of dragging him through the water like a fly on a troll. I told him he ought to thank his star that he was alive at all, instead of complaining at the manner of his rescue.

"Oh, I know, Captain," he said, "but I don't know what Rawson meant by such recklessness. Why," he added, laughing, "just think! If you and Rawson had shut your eyes a minute, you might have had the pearls all to yourselves."

I never knew a man of keener perceptions, or one more capable of putting other persons at their ease when he chose to. Many fine qualities had Van Pelt, and what strange streak of perversity it was in him that made him suppress them and give full play to the worse side of his nature puzzled and annoyed me.

But I was still more puzzled presently over the change that came about in Rawson's attitude to his old foe. The two grew actually chummy. Hour after hour, while I stood at the wheel, they lay on their backs under the mainsail boom, chinning on topics ranging all the way from psychology to New Zealand politics. I caught snatches of their talk from time to time, and soon noticed that they never discussed women, any phase or activity of them. I was distinctly out of it all; but whatever grubby feelings I may have had over Rawson's defection, I squelched them as I recalled my first fears.

I almost had anticipated bloodshed on the *Lazy Lou's* deck. Place two men in the

Digitized by Google

narrow confines of a small schooner with the ghost of a woman between them, and if something red does not happen, it is probably because one of them does not measure up to the other in moral fiber. And Rawson and Van Pelt each had a man's quota of moral and physical courage.

III

THUS we came to Okuku. It was early evening when we brought up in the little bay, and we decided not to go ashore till morning. Rawson was ailing. His plunge after Van Pelt had brought on a fever. One night he had gone off his head, and Van Pelt had sat with him, except when I needed him on deck, and had discouraged any attentions of mine to the sick man. I suspected that Rawson was raving about the girl, and Van Pelt did not want me to listen.

Morning found Rawson much better, but weak. He said he would stay by the schooner, and Van Pelt and I rowed ashore to look for the pearls. Van Pelt was confident that he could walk right up to the wall, put in his hand and fetch it out again with the gems.

Farrold's directions had been most explicit. Van Pelt was to go to the upper end of the wall and walk along its face till he found a large triangular stone at the height of his chin. The pearls would be in a deep crevice above and a little to the left of it. Well, we found the triangular stone easily enough, but there was no crevice of any size to the left of and above it. Then we found other large triangular stones, and fell into a difference of opinion as to which was the upper end of the wall.

Neither end seemed to stand higher than the other. If by "upper," Farrold had meant the northern end, we had begun all wrong. So we trudged the length of the wall, which was fully three-quarters of a mile long and ran in a semicircle, paralleling the sea. Here I raised another point, to wit, which was the face of the wall? Van Pelt cursed Farrold for his stupidity, and I said I wished we had brought Rawson along, because he understood almost everything.

Then Van Pelt said:

"The wall faces the sea, Captain. Therefore, the side nearer the sea is the face."

"But," I objected, "undoubtedly the people who built the wall lived on the side away from the sea. That being the case, you see, the side away from the sea is, beyond peradventure, the face of the wall, because it was the side they were accustomed to see."

We argued the matter with some heat before it occurred to us that each could take his chosen side of the wall and conduct an independent search for the large triangular stone. It took me no less than two hours to arrive at the farther end. I found innumberable three-cornered stones, but not one of them was in proximity to a deep crevice. As I swung around the end of the wall, I ran into Van Pelt.

"Find 'em?" he asked.

"Yes, eighty, more or less," I replied unthinkingly. "But not one of them is close to a crevice."

"Oh, rats!" he exclaimed. "I meant the pearls."

"I am hungry," I said. "I am going aboard. I will strike the bell when dinner is ready." But Van Pelt said he would waive dinner till he found the pearls.

When dinner was ready I hammered the ship's bell till Rawson asked me crossly what I thought his head was made of. Van Pelt did not appear. Later I made several trips ashore with provisions and bedding, and rigged up a tent on the beach for Rawson. He complained that the rolling of the lugger nauseated him. While I was pegging the tent, Van Pelt hove to. He was discouraged and cross as a gouty skipper. He had been pulling the wall apart and his hands were bleeding from contact with the sharp stone.

He washed them in the brine, and then sat down with his pipe and passed cynical remarks about my work. Finally he exasperated me and I told him testily to turn to and help, or to shut up. He disappeared soon after. Chancing to look out to the schooner a half hour later, I saw him bending over Rawson's hammock, talking earnestly. Somehow, the picture he made there gave me a sort of chill. I can't explain why, but I thought suddenly of poor Farrold and his fate.

When the camp was put to rights we decided to have another go at the pearls. Rawson took only a sick man's languid interest in the search. I wanted his counsel, knowing how easily he solved the most intricate problems; but whatever his advice

Digitized by Google

may have been, he kept it to himself. When Van Pelt and I reached the wall, I said:

"We have jumped into this matter too hastily. If we make a slow, systematic search, it may save us time in the end. By the way, did Farrold say your chin, or his own?"

"What the devil has that got to do with it?" he snapped.

"Only this," I replied. "I think you said that Farrold was a little man, while you are six feet two. It is a matter of a foot or so difference in the height of the triangular stone, that's all."

"Beg your pardon, Captain. You are right," he apologized. "Farrold said 'your chin.' I am certain of that. But doubtless he was thinking of his own. We'll look lower down."

We tramped up and down till dark, without success, and returned to the camp. Rawson had rallied from the fever and was feeling quite pert. He had even gotten supper for us. When it was disposed of, we all lighted up, and Rawson demanded a report of our afternoon's work. He listened attentively to all Van Pelt had to say, and then remarked:

"I think I can find those pearls. Tomorrow, if I am strong enough, I will take a hand in this hunt myself."

"What's the idea?" Van Pelt asked eagerly.

"It is only an idea. I am 'fond av theourisin',' as Mulvaney says. But if the pearls are in the wall, I believe I can find them without much trouble."

I can't say how pleased Van Pelt and I were at this announcement. Rawson was a quiet, unassuming fellow, but he had a way of breaking through obstacles and getting things done that gave us great confidence in him.

About midnight I awoke with a start, and with every sense alert. Some sound, unlike the usual night noises, such as the sough of the waves and the croaking of insects, had aroused me. It still lingered in my ears, but I could not determine it. I sat up and looked around for Van Pelt. He was sleeping heavily just beyond me. Then I rose and peered into Rawson's tent.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I wish I knew," I said. "I heard something. I thought it came from the water. Some one is about—perhaps it is only a native. Hark!"

A new sound reached us, the unmistakable whirr of a cable running through a hawsehole, followed by a splash. I ran to Van Pelt and shook him awake.

"Van Pelt," I whispered, "we have visitors. A ship has just come in."

"A ship?" he asked, sitting up. "Then it is Farrold's pals. I have been expecting them."

We walked down to the water's edge, but could make out nothing beyond the black hull of the *Lazy Lou*.

"We'll have to watch," I said. "They may come ashore any minute. Finding us here, they'll want an explanation. Sailingmen don't come here for nothing."

We returned to the camp and Van Pelt lay down, but did not sleep. Rawson joined us for a few minutes, but the night air chilled him and he went back to his blankets.

WITH the first streaks of dawn we made out a large sloop standing a hundred yards to windward of the lugger. Soon a boat shot around her stern and headed for the beach. It appeared to hold only one man.

"Got your gun handy?" Van Pelt asked. "If he is one of the brutes who marooned Farrold, he is an ugly customer. Let me do the talk-talk."

Beaching the skiff, the man threw a gunny-sack over his right arm and hallooed to us. Van Pelt answered him, and he came on up the sand. He was a big man, nearly as tall as Van Pelt, and heavier, and wore a thick yellow beard.

"Saw your schooner," he said by way of introduction. "Ships don't put in here often."

"No?" said Van Pelt carelessly. "The gale drove us in—opened up some seams. We're repairing."

"Where is your crew?" the stranger asked, peering into the tent.

"Gone inland for fresh water," Van Pelt lied.

The man flipped the gunny-sack suddenly from his arm and thrust up a revolver.

"Stick your hands up! Smart now!" he rasped. "That's right," as our arms shot over our heads. "Keep them so. Now maybe you'll tell me just what you *are* doing here."

"We had an idea we might pick up some pearls," said Van Pelt coolly.

The man looked at him keenly to see if he was serious, then said:

Digitized by Google

"That so? You're —— frank about it."

"What's the use of bluffing? You are after them, too, I suppose."

"Where's that swine Farrold?" the bearded chap asked suddenly.

"On Bottle Island."

"Bottle Island? What's he doing there?"

"Just resting," said Van Pelt with a grin. "He got tired of your company. Since I've seen you, I don't blame him."

"That will *do!*" the fellow roared. "Make any more of them cracks and you'll wish you hadn't." Then he dropped his bullying tone, and said, "Hand over the pearls and I'll let you have Farrold's share of them to pay you for your trouble in coming here."

"Indeed!" said Van Pelt smoothly. "Rather thought we would keep them all ourselves, you know."

The other fellow pretended to sight the revolver at Van Pelt's forehead; and a loaded revolver pointed at your face, let me say, is a powerful persuasive.

"I thought we might settle this little matter without spilling any blood," he began.

And then there was the flash and roar of a revolver from the tent and his gun flew from his hand, while blood spurted over his forearm. Van Pelt rushed in and gave him a stiff wallop on his chin, and he pitched over on the back of his head just as we heard a second shot and Van Pelt himself sat down with a grunt. I looked around to see Rawson standing in the door of the tent.

"Get down!" he shouted. "Get down!" and began shooting toward the water.

"What is it?" I asked.

"There's a man in the boat with a rifle," he said, dropping and reloading. At that instant a bullet clipped past my face so close that I heard the whine of it. The yellow-bearded chap sat up and began bellowing orders to his mate till Van Pelt trained his revolver on him.

"One word more out of you, and it will be your bally last," he threatened.

The man in the boat kept up a fusillade of shots, and no one cared to raise his head. We were on a level stretch of grass about eighty yards up from the water, and while we lay flat, the beach crest protected us. I asked Van Pelt where he was hit.

"Pinked in the shoulder," he growled. "Don't worry about me. Get that other pirate."

Rawson beckoned to me and began wriggling back into the bushes. I followed, and when we were out of ear-shot of the others, he said:

"I am going to work my way over here to the left and flank that fellow in the boat. You go to the right and work down behind those rocks as close as you can safely. That farthest rock is easy revolver range. When you see me rush him, pot him in the back."

"No, you don't, Steve," I protested. "We'll take our time about this, and run no unnecessary risks. He can't stay in that boat forever, and the minute he leaves it, we've got him. Wish I had brought my rifle from the schooner. If he's still there tonight, I'll swim out and get it."

"One thing more," Rawson said. "In case I—don't come back, watch Van Pelt. Don't ask me any questions. Just keep an eye on him. I believe the fool is crazy."

"So?" I said. "I suspected it. He is planning to do with me what those thugs did to Farrold—maybe worse. I'll watch him, don't fear. But I am glad you warned me."

He reached out his hand and grasped mine. I wished that he had not done it though; it seemed almost like a farewell, as if he knew he would not come back from our attack on the boat.

"If I *do* rush him," he said, "do your part."

I began to remonstrate again, but he was moving off on his knees. I turned in the opposite direction and went about two hundred yards, then turned toward the beach and found myself among the rocks. Unlike most of the islands in those seas, Okuku was of volcanic origin, not coral formation, which accounted for the boulders strewn along the beach.

I could see nothing of the man in the boat except one hand and the top of his head. His rifle rested steadily on the gunwale. The boat was careened away from me, but Rawson on his side must have had a view of the man's whole body. It was some minutes before he noticed me dodging from rock to rock. His warning was the spat of a bullet against a boulder whose shelter I had just gained.

After that he paid me scant attention. He seemed to be watching something on the far side, probably Rawson darting through the bushes. Then he began firing rapidly,

Digitized by Google

and I saw that Rawson had broken from cover and was rushing toward the boat. He was saving his bullets for close work, and running in a zigzag course to lessen his chances of being shot. I rose, steadied my hand on the top of the rock, and began pulling the trigger.

The man in the boat had risen also, and made a fair mark for my bullets, one of which must have got him; for he turned suddenly, dropped his rifle outside the boat and fell to his knees. An instant later, however, he recovered his rifle and raised it to fire at Rawson. At his first shot Rawson fell forward.

I found myself running down to the boat, snapping the trigger of my empty revolver and shrieking curses. Rawson, the best friend I had had in half a score of years, was dead, murdered by that scoundrel who had sent Farrold to his death, wounded Van Pelt and tried to do for us all.

He now turned his attention to me, raised his rifle and steadied it, looking along the sights. He knew his time had come if he failed to stop me, and he did not intend to miss. I was within thirty yards of the boat now, running at top speed. I had thrown away my revolver, and was hoping only to live long enough to get my hands on the murderer's throat.

I heard a shot. His rifle fell, spouting flame, and he himself tumbled forward, half out of the boat, and lay still. I looked beyond and saw Rawson leaning on his elbows, supporting his revolver in his left hand. He got up and came to the boat.

"You bally fool!" he said unsociably. "If I had missed him, it would have been all day for you. Why didn't you stay among the rocks?"

I was too happy over seeing him alive to resent his reproof.

"Then you weren't hit?" I asked amazed.

"Not even scratched," he answered. "I dropped to fool him."

He stooped over and looked at the dead man's face. When he straightened, he was laughing quietly.

"We got his nerve. I thought we could," he said. "Bah! These swine haven't any moral stamina. You or I, with his rifle, could have held the boat against a dozen men with revolvers. But he—why, he lost his control the minute he saw two of us closing in, and couldn't shoot straight. And *stood up!*"

IV

TWE DUG a grave well up the beach and put the dead man into it. Then Van Pelt and I rowed the bearded chap out to his sloop and put him aboard and saw him out of the bay. With good weather he could work the sloop single-handed over to New Wight, less than sixty miles to the west. We promised sudden death for him if we caught him in the vicinity again.

It was after nine o'clock when we got back to the camp. We had eaten no breakfast and set about making it. Rawson was nowhere in sight. Van Pelt then walked off toward the wall, and I crawled into Rawson's tent.

It was early afternoon when I woke, and Van Pelt was putting a pot over the fire. I asked him where Rawson was, but he chose not to answer. Then Rawson walked in and sat down by the blaze.

"Oh, Sanger!" he called. "Where are you?" I came from the tent. "I want to show you something," he added, and from the inside of his shirt took a wad of flannel as big as my forearm. Van Pelt dropped the pot and sprang forward. Rawson waved him back and began unrolling the bundle.

They were the pearls, right enough; more than two hundred of them, large and small, some of the finest I ever saw. A greedy glitter came into Van Pelt's eyes. He was breathing heavily as he pawed them over, picking out the larger ones and scrutinizing them.

"How did you find them?" I asked.

Rawson laughed.

"By my theory," he said.

"And that?"

"Well, I started on the premise that Farrold had not hidden them near a triangular stone at all."

"But he said he did!" Van Pelt snapped, as if Rawson had charged him with misquoting the dead man.

"Friend Farrold forgot," said Rawson quietly. "You and Sanger proved that quite conclusively. The fact is, Farrold's *first* intention was to hide them near a triangular stone so he could locate them quickly when he returned to the island. Either he realized that, with so many triangular stones thereabouts, identification would be difficult, or he failed to find a

Digitized by Google

crevice near-by deep enough to secrete the pearls.

"So he dropped his original plan and searched for a stone of another distinctive shape. That is exactly what I figured on his doing. So I looked for a stone unlike any other in the wall, and found one, as nearly round as you could hope to find. There was a crevice near it, and that is where I found the pearls."

"Then Farrold lied to Van Pelt about their whereabouts?" I asked.

"Not intentionally. You see, his first thought, and the one which occurred to him most vividly as he lay dying, was of the triangular stone. So he mentioned it to Van Pelt. Mere lapse of memory."

"Is that what you call deductive reasoning?" I asked.

"Mere common sense, I call it," Rawson replied. "I tried to put myself in Farrold's place, when he abandoned the triangular stone idea, and reasoned out what I would have done under the circumstances."

Van Pelt was not paying any heed to our talk. He was still gloating over the pearls, sorting them into little piles according to their sizes. I did not like his absorption, so I said:

"Rawson, we'll make you custodian of the plunder. Keep the things till we get back to Little Fisher. Then we'll see if McVickers can handle them. If he can't, we will run down to Auckland and dispose of them."

Rawson looked away quickly as I mentioned the city, and I was sorry I had recalled the great grief of his life.

Having found the pearls, there was no call for us to remain at Okuku. I took stock of the weather, and began transferring the camp back to the schooner. Van Pelt was in one of his surly moods, due, maybe, to the bullet hole in his shoulder. I had advised him to doctor it, but beyond washing it with a basin of sea-water he affected to ignore it.

Away from the schooner he was disinclined to take orders from me, and helped, or did not, in dismantling the camp, as the whim took him. Rawson was on his back again, done up with the morning's exertions; so I had most of the work to do.

I got everything stowed aboard about six o'clock, but decided not to lift anchor till morning. I did not want a run-in with Van Pelt, and until his mood changed for the better he would be anything but a help in handling the schooner. I watched him as he strode across and across the deck, smoking furiously, and wondered what was in his mind.

About seven, while I was in the galley picking up supper, Rawson came shakily to the door, and said:

"The pearls have disappeared."

"Where is Van Pelt?" I asked sharply.

"Gone, too. Went over the side a minute ago."

I ran to the rail and saw Van Pelt pulling for the beach. Pitching our remaining boat into the water, I grabbed up a pair of oars and pushed off. Then I heard Rawson screaming deliriously:

"If you pull that gun, Van Pelt, I'll drill you. So help me, I'll drill you like a dog!"

I looked up and saw him kneeling at the port with a rifle trained on Van Pelt's boat.

The latter reached the beach a full minute ahead of me. When his boat grounded he jumped out and ran up toward our late camp. It was growing dark rapidly, and I was fearful of losing him. I plunged into the shallow water and began running. When I passed the camp he was not fifty yards away, going slowly. Either his wind was bad from long indulgence in alcohol or his wound prevented deep breathing; for, as he looked back over his shoulder, I saw by his distorted face that he was already in distress.

I drew my revolver and plunged on. A moment more and he would be brought to bay by the wall. The shadows lay deep among the trees, and Van Pelt himself was scarcely more than one of them. Thirty yards from the wall I stumbled. When I regained my balance and looked up, Van Pelt had disappeared. It had been the merest fraction of a minute that my eyes had left him, yet in that instant he had vanished like the flash of a gun.

I sprang aside quickly, fearing he had hidden behind a tree and was waiting to potshot me as I rushed past. For a moment there was absolute silence. Then something stirred close at my side.

My skin began to prickle all over, and I raised my arm defensively. Then I saw a figure, tall, erect, motionless.

"Van Pelt——" I began.

The figure dropped to its knees and I stepped forward and saw that it was a

Digitized by Google

black, the first I had seen on the island. Doubtless he had been spying on us.

"What do you want?" I demanded. And then, "Where did he go?"

He pointed upward and burst into a torrent of half-intelligible words. Clearly he was frightened, as if he had witnessed some demonstration of the supernatural. From what I could gather from his jargon he was saying that the big man had disappeared into the sky.

I LEFT him in disgust and went forward cautiously to where I had last seen Van Pelt. Striking several matches, I looked over the ground and found his footprints pressed deep into the spongy earth. I followed them till they ceased abruptly about fifteen feet from the wall. Search as I might, I could not pick them up again.

I began looking in ever-widening circles around the spot, but with no success. Then I paused and tried to consider the matter soberly. Van Pelt had run to a certain point and then disappeared as completely as if, as the black said, he had been lifted into the sky. Something akin to fear began tugging at my heart.

It was uncanny, thrilling, this sudden annihilation of a flesh-and-blood creature. Absurd? Of course. And yet for the moment it made my senses reel. I paced off the distance to the wall and looked at the top. No human being could have bridged that space with a single bound. Fifteen feet along the ground, and then nine more to the top of the wall. No, not even Van Pelt could have done it. I climbed aloft and looked down on the other side. Nothing but darkness and silence lay beyond.

When I got back to the schooner, Rawson was dozing. I hadn't the heart to waken him, eager as I was for his counsel. If any one could explain Van Pelt's vanishing act, I knew he could. I ate a few mouthfuls and went back to sit with him. He woke presently, in the full grip of the fever.

"Did you get him?" he asked feebly.

"No," I replied, and then blurted out all about his mysterious disappearance. He listened with closed eyes, and when I had finished remained so still that I thought he was sleeping.

"Strange," he muttered finally. "Sure he couldn't reach the top of the wall with his fingers from where his footmarks stopped? Van Pelt is very strong, you know."

"No man could," I answered vehemently. "It was a rise of full nine feet."

"Was he carrying anything?"

"Yes. A rifle, I thought; but I didn't know there was another aboard the schooner." He was silent for a long time, and I began reproaching myself for disturbing him. Then—

"Let us think," he said, as if trying to summon back his straying faculties. "He was carrying something that looked like a rifle, but was not a rifle. Now tell me, did you notice if an oar was missing from his boat?"

"An oar *was* missing," I said. "I thought it had fallen overboard and been carried out with the tide."

"Ah! Now we are getting at it. Did you see, midway between his last footprints and the wall, a deep score in the earth, as if you had chopped it with an ax, or planted an oar blade there?"

"No, I didn't."

"I think you will find one," he said. "Van used to be a good vaulter at the university, before he put on so much flesh."

With that he turned over and really went to sleep.

I was dog-tired, but hardly dared abandon myself to sleep. If Van Pelt were crazy, as Rawson suggested, he might be back at any minute to murder us in our sleep. He could then impress a crew of islanders and return to his haunts richer by a hundred thousand dollars. But nature would have her way; and the next thing I knew it was morning, and the lugger was rolling to a lively swell. Rawson seemed to have fallen from his chair and was lying in a huddle on the deck. He roused as I got up, stretched out his legs, and fell asleep again.

V

AFTER breakfast I set out resolutely to hunt down Van Pelt. It was improbable that he had left the island during the night, though his plans, doubtless, were to get a proa from the natives and make shift for himself as Farrold had done. I knew, however, that he would not repeat Farrold's mistake and leave the pearls behind him. I was determined that Rawson and I should not be deprived of our share in them after all the danger and hardship we had been through

Digitized by Google

to get them. If forty thousand dollars ever looked good to me, it was right then.

I found the stab in the earth made by the oar blade, as Rawson said I would. I got to the top of the wall and scrambled along it, looking for some clue of Van Pelt's course. If he had jumped from the wall, his bootprints would show in the soft turf.

I had gone but a short distance when I was brought up sharply by a revolver shot. Dropping flat I looked around and saw Van Pelt sitting propped against a tree in the distance. He was wagging his head foolishly and drawing crazy circles in the air with the point of his revolver.

"Either looney or sick," I commented.

"I see you!" he bellowed. "Come down, you bally fool. Come down, or I'll bring you." And he sped another bullet, which came nowhere near me.

"Put down that gun," I ordered. "If you are sick, I'll help you."

His reply was another shot, but I did not fear his bullets now. His hand was weak, and the gun kicked up a foot every time he pressed the trigger. I slid from the wall and dodged from tree to tree till I was within twenty yards of him. He had closed his eyes, and his chin had sunk to his breast.

"Drop that gun, Van Pelt!" I repeated.

He started awake, snapped the trigger harmlessly and flung the weapon aside.

"Game's up," he said thickly. "Steve wins."

Evidently he thought death was near, and was thinking rather of the girl than of the pearls. I saw that he was in a raging fever. One shoe was off and his ankle was badly swollen.

"Sprained ankle—like —— fool," he said. "Fell off the wall—in the dark."

He shifted his position slightly and I caught a glimpse of the flannel-swathed pearls between his back and the tree.

"Got a drink, Captain?" he asked.

I handed him my flask, uncorked, but his hand trembled so that he wasted a goodly part of the liquor.

"Well, what now? Jail-yard at Bala-Bala?" he asked with a touch of his old insolence.

"Nonsense, Van," I said. "It's you to the sick bay. You can't walk, of course. But I will scare up some blacks."

I hesitated a minute, and he divined my thought.

"Take them," he said, reaching behind him for the pearls. "What won't a man do for a few sparklers?" he added whimsically.

It was no easy task securing aid from the natives. Money was little inducement to them, as they had no way of spending it. Finally, by doing a little stage play with my revolver, I bullied them into accompanying me. They improvised a stretcher and an hour later we had Van Pelt aboard the lugger.

He was in a state of coma by that time, and I set about remedying, as far as possible, both his fever and the sprain. The wound in his shoulder gave me most concern, as it was highly inflamed. Rawson was useless. His condition was nearly as bad as Van Pelt's. With two sick men on my hands, both delirious at times, my work was cut out for me.

Toward noon I heard Van Pelt calling, and went to him. He seemed to be sinking fast, and was convinced that his last hour had come. Fever in the tropics does quickly for a man, and no man as full-blooded as Van Pelt can survive long, swilling more than a quart of white whisky a day. His body loses the power of resistance.

"You can swing me overboard soon now, Captain," he said with a cackling laugh, "but before I go to feed the sharks, I want you to do something for me. Get pencil and paper."

I went below, returning in a minute with the articles desired.

"Put this down," he said. " 'Miss Hildegard Van Kirk, Mountain Road, Auckland.' Got it? Now, then—I want my share of the pearls to go to her. Understand, Captain? To her and to no one else."

"Come, come, old man! You are not done for yet," I said with far more confidence than I felt. "You've still got some kicks left in you for your blacks on Bottle Island."

He smiled, but shook his head.

When I went below to Rawson a little later, he asked how Van Pelt was—would know what he wanted. I told him it was about the pearls, and showed him the address on the paper. He stared at the name a minute, then struggled to his feet and seized me in a frenzied grip.

" 'Miss'?" he whispered hoarsely. "Did he say 'Miss'?"

"He did," I replied.

"It's *her!*" he said in an awed voice.

Digitized by Google

"My God, if it's true!" Then he ran up the stairs and I after him. He seized Van Pelt, as he had seized me, and shook him out of his coma.

"Van, Van!" he rasped. "Is it true? Didn't she marry you? Speak, man, speak! Can't you talk?"

Van Pelt opened his eyes and stared at him stupidly.

"Van," Rawson pleaded, "tell me, old man; didn't Hildegard marry you?"

"No," said Van Pelt wearily. "She wouldn't have me."

"But they told me—" Rawson began. "Are you speaking true, Van?"

The other's head had sunk forward again. I thought he was dying, his breath came with such labor. But Rawson raised him by the chin.

"Van," he repeated, "tell me. Do you speak true? For God's sake, answer me!"

Then he turned to me.

"He's dying. What shall I do? He won't answer me."

I took him by the arm and drew him back gently.

"If he is dying, let him die in peace," I said. Heaven knows, two sick men were bad enough, but two loonies were more than I ever had bargained for.

But just then Van Pelt struggled up and said slowly:

"I tell you, she wouldn't—have me. I said she loved some other—man. And that's—God's truth. She is waiting, Steve. I never—would have told you, if you hadn't gone overboard—for me."

"But they said she married you," Rawson reiterated with a sick man's insistency.

" —— you, Steve, I'm telling you she didn't," said Van Pelt with a flash of his former spirit. "I—wasn't good enough—for her."

Then he lapsed into unconsciousness.

VI

VAN PELT did not die—then. It is one of the marvels of my life experience that he did not. His early athletic training had stood him in good stead, and his years of dissipation, seemingly, had not wholly undermined the wonderful constitution that nature had given him.

By the time we hove to at Little Fisher he was on his feet again, but a changed man. All his old arrogance and braggadocio had left him. He grew reserved and thoughtful, but not the least bit soured. On the contrary, he became very companionable, and remained so as long as I knew him. He passed out finally in the Boer war, dying as I would have had him die, gallantly leading his troop to the charge.

As for Rawson, his recovery was almost as wonderful. I've read what the poet chaps say about the power of love, but I had never seen that power in the working. It rejuvenated and transformed him in body and soul.

I heard from him four months later from Auckland. He said in part:

Am having the time of my life. You must come out to see us as soon as possible. Mrs. R.—Hildegard—insists that you come. And let me put this flea in your ear, old man. She has a sister only less wonderful than herself. Don't let grass grow under your feet.

Digitized by Google

STATE O' MAINE

By Charles Edward Daniell

Author of "The Cat's-Paw"

"STORY? Well, there's the keel of the yarn hanging up there," remarked Captain Nate Gifford, pointing with the stem of his pipe to the wall over the mantelpiece in the sitting-room of No. 8 Life Saving Station on the east coast of Florida. "State had that picture taken in Key West on his way North as a Government witness just after the blow-up. An' it's a talking likeness of the boy, too, that picture is."

STATE? Well, of course that isn't his real name. His true name is Jenks—Abner Jenks. But no one from Boca Rattones to Key Largo ever called him anything but 'State.' He kind o' named himself, I reckon, the first time he landed—the day the *Anna Belle* hogged on the reef ten miles below here, off Key Vaccas. The boats were loaded to the rail with women an' children, an' State, who was first mate of the wrecked schooner, couldn't see a chance to so much as get a toe in without capsizing 'em all.

"Go on!" he yells to 'em scornful-like. "I ain't sugar nor salt I guess!"

And with that he dives and strikes out for the shore a mile away. When he landed on the beach, the crowd busted their throats in a volley of cheers, but State didn't appear to take it complimentary.

"Shucks!" he roars, belching up a couple o' quarts of salt-water. "'S nothin'! Swum—Bay o' Casco—many a time—down—State o' Maine!"

That was what everlastingly tagged him, I reckon—that, an' his eternally comparing everything on top of the earth or under the sea, with things down in Maine. There wasn't any use wasting your breath about the wonders of London, Paris or Timbuctoo, because Bangor 'n' Bath had 'em all nailed to the floor an' beat to frazzled shoe-strings. An' as for women——

"Don't blow so all-fired strong," I says to him one day. "You ain't got the world tied in a knot up in Maine. You can't even raise persimmons up there."

"Cap," he says, "I guess you never heard about the potatoes we raise up in the Pine Tree State, have you? Why, we beat the world! An' say! I'd like to show you a real woman just once—a State o' Maine woman!"

Well, one stormy night, the two of us sat right here in this room, smokin' an' tellin' sea yarns. My wife was up North on a visit, an' State—who was holdin' down a hundred an' sixty acres of government land across the Bay with a patch o' pineapples—agreed to come over an' keep me company. A howlin' nor'easter lashed the Station till it creaked an' whined like a crippled old dog, an' on the beach below us the surf boomed an' thundered. Suddenly we both sat up, stiff backed, an' listened. Above the shriek of the storm came the wailin', windin' moan of a conch-shell. We both jumped to our feet.

"It's a sponger, cap! She's on the reef!" hollers State. "She's tryin' to——"

But he stopped right there. For a black figure shot by the piazza windows, an' the next minute the door burst open, an' a blast of wind drove a woman clean into the middle of the room.

Well, sir, if old Father Neptune with his pitchfork had walked in on us it couldn't have surprised us more. She was dressed in a long black coat, her hair hangin' in wet strings over her eyes, carryin' a hand-bag in one hand, an' drenched to the skin.

Digitized by Google

"Excuse me, gentlemen," she says pleasantly, an' as calm as a mill-pond, the water tricklin' down her face. "Isn't this the Life Savin' Station?"

"Yes, ma'am," I replies. "This is the U. S. Life Savin' Station an' House of Refuge No. 8. Have you just swum ashore?"

She laughed.

"Oh, no. I haven't been wrecked. Is this Captain Gifford?"

I told her it was, an' tried to have her shed her wet clothes an' dry them, but she only shook her head.

"No use to do that, captain," she says. "I'd only get them wet again. I've got to go on to Hillsboro' River tonight. Old Mr. Clark, who brought me across the Bay, said he thought you might take me up there."

I reckon my jaw must have dropped. Anyway, State's did, an' we both stood starin' at her.

"Hillsboro' River!" I sung out. "Why, miss, there ain't a soul livin' up to Hillsboro'. There's nothin' up there but cocoplum bushes an' 'gators. But anyhow, a small boat couldn't live in this sea tonight."

HER face grew sober an' her lips tightened.

"I've got to get up there somehow, captain," she says firmly. "My father's up there, an' I've got to get to him tonight."

"Your father!"

Here was a girl blown out'r the sea talkin' about her father, an' I knew every man in Dade County!

"There's some mistake here, miss," I said, an' I felt pretty sorry to disappoint her, standing there wet an' tired, but with a brave look in her eyes.

"I know every white man an' Seminole Indian from St. Lucie to Elliott's Key. What's your father's name?"

"Shackleford," she replies, "an' my name is Amy Roberts. He's really my stepfather, but the only father I ever knew. I'm very anxious to get to him—" her chin quivered just a little, but she held herself—"for my Aunt, with whom I've always lived in the North, has died suddenly, an' somehow I haven't been able to reach him by letter. But I know he is here."

"He doesn't know you're comin', then?" I said.

"No. That is, I don't think so. I've written him five letters to Munden, but can get no answer," she replied. "Something tells me he's in trouble, Captain Gifford."

"Shackleford! I never heard of him. What's he doing down here?" I asked.

"He's with some scientific expedition at Hillsboro River. He——"

But that was enough. I broke in right there.

"I reckon I know what you're talking about now," I said. "I've heard about that party that's camped out in the Everglades, photographin' bugs, an' birds, an' leather-back turtle. But you couldn't go there tonight, young lady, any more'n you could fly to the moon. You'll have to stay here as Uncle Sam's guest, an' mine. I'll give you my wife's room, an' you can fit yourself out with some of her clothes."

Her brown eyes took State an' me in with a quick glance. Then she walked over to the window an' stood gazing out into the black, raging night.

"Well," she finally says in a disappointed tone, "if it's impossible, captain, I suppose——"

"It couldn't be done tonight, miss," I said. "If it clears up tomorrow, perhaps some of us can manage it. Come—" I took her bag an' led her toward the stairs—"I'll show you my wife's room an' light a little blaze in the stove. You'll be as safe an' dry up there as in your own room at home. An' you're very welcome."

She gave a little sigh an' smiled faintly.

"Well, if I'm obliged to," she answered. "An' anyway, thank you, captain," an' her eyes traveled over the room. "Somehow, it reminds me of home, too. Perhaps it's the sea—the roar of the surf on the beach. I've always lived, you know, on the coast of Maine."

State hadn't said a word so far, but at this he straightened up, an' I thought his eyes would pop out of his head. He took a quick step forward.

"Miss—Miss Roberts," he stammered, "are you really a—a Maine woman?"

She gave him a surprised look, then laughed, an' her eyes brightened.

"I suppose I am," she said. "I was born an' I've always lived in Kennebunk."

"Holy mackerel!" hollers State; then he blushed as red as a beet.

"An' my home's in Saco! Well! well!" His eyes were eating her up. "I'm mighty glad to see you down here, Miss Roberts.

Digitized by Google

Tomorrow we'll—I mean I'll help you myself to find your father. That's my job. You see, we are neighbors."

"Indeed we are!" answers the girl, beaming. "Next-door neighbors, an' Kennebunk is glad to shake hands with Saco."

She laughed an' held out her hand.

"Besides, it makes me feel quite at home, captain, to know that Mr. ——"

"Jenks," I put in. "Abner Jenks, Miss Roberts, though we never call him that. He brags so strong about your State he's got it for a nickname. Every one down here calls him State o' Maine."

"I like that," replies the girl. "It sounds honest. An' you know, captain—" and her eyes twinkled—"there's a saying down East that 'everything good comes from Maine.' "

"So State's been dinging into us for two years," says I, "but he never proved it till tonight."

"You can't be quite sure of that, captain," she laughed. "A saying, like a rule, always has exceptions," an' with a good-night to State, she followed me up the stairs.

Well, I made her as comfortable as I could, an' telling her to help herself to any clothes she might find in the closets, I said good night an' left her. Downstairs, I found State marching up an' down the room as nervous an' worried as a captain in a salvage court.

"Skipper," he says, mighty solemn, "there's somethin' wrong here. What do you make out of it?"

"I haven't had time to think yet," I answered. "I'm just gettin' over my surprise at seein' the girl at all."

"Miss Roberts is all right. I'll bank on that," declares State, "an' she's as brave an' honest as she's pretty. Shows the real old State o' Maine spunk, too, chasin' her stepfather up like this. But what gets me are those letters. Why didn't he write to her? She's written him five times, she says."

"Perhaps he never received them," I suggested. "What do you know about this scientific bug-outfit anyway? Ever meet any of 'em?"

"No," says State. "I've only heard they have a camp back in the Everglades about five miles northeast of New River. I never saw any of 'em in Munden. Looks like they keep pretty much to themselves. But they must get their mail somehow, an' this Shackleford ought to have received her letters."

"Yes," I said. "That seems queer to me."

"Now look here, cap." State came to a full stop in front of me an' stood scowling. "That's no place for a little woman like Miss Roberts to butt into without knowing more than she does about her father. It's a tough trip anyway—we'll have to canoe the 'glades half the way up from Hillsboro Inlet. Why isn't it better for me to make the first trip alone? Then if everything is all right I can take her up?"

"That's good sense," I agreed. "An' I hope she won't be disappointed about her father. I like that girl."

"She could write a letter for me to give to him," he proposed. "Skipper, I want you to bear down on this. Make her agree to it."

"She'll probably kick pretty hard about it if I know anything about firm little chins," I said. "But I reckon we can make her hear reason."

JUST at the gray crack of day, I crept down-stairs and threw open the doors leading on to the piazza. The storm was over, and a fresh easterly trade wind drove the rolling combers on to the beach with the thunder of booming cannon. State was over at the inside landing on the Bay getting his Indian canoe ready for the trip; and as the red eye of the sun peeked over the rim of the Atlantic I heard the girl's light step coming down the stairs. She looked as fresh and sweet as an armful of apple-blossoms, and sailed right into frying the bacon. Then State showed up and we sat down to breakfast.

She kicked at the change of plan, as I knew she would, but we finally convinced her that it was for the best. So she wrote a short letter to her father, and then we walked over to the canoe landing and saw State off. As his broad shoulders bent over the pole, and the log canoe shot like a long black snake out through the mangroves and into an arm of Biscayne Bay, she called after him gaily—

"Tell him I'm safe and in good hands, Mr.—er—State o' Maine."

He laughed and waved to her, and we walked back to the house. But, gentlemen! There was a little housekeeper for you! Sit around and twiddle her thumbs? Not she!

Digitized by Google

In an hour's time, she had the Station put to rights—dishes washed, beds made, and the whole place dusted up as it hadn't been since Maria left. Then she started to sweep the piazza, and I stopped her.

"Hold on," I says, "I'm the captain of the quarter-deck," and took the broom away from her. "Come and sit down here; we'll have a little talk."

She got some needlework out of her bag; and with the breeze rufflin' her crown of dark hair, we sat pretty much all day on the piazza looking out to sea, with the thunder of the surf and hiss of the undertow sounding in our ears. Her own father had died when she was a baby, it seemed, and her mother after marrying this Shackleford had only lived a few years, so he had placed her with her mother's sister at the age of twelve. And now the aunt was dead and she was anxious to find her stepfather.

"I haven't seen him for five years, you see, captain," she said. "I've been with my aunt, and he is interested in something to do with photography in Washington. But he's always written regularly, and I know there's a good reason for his silence. I only pray that he's alive."

"When did you last hear from him?" I asked her.

"It's more than three months," she replied. "When my aunt died he should have come, but I couldn't find him. Then, a friend of his in Washington notified me that he had gone with this expedition. It's all so baffling and strange. He's the kindest-hearted man alive, and I can't think he'd do this thing lightly. Furthermore, I love my stepfather, and want to make a home for him."

"Well, I reckon it's all right," I said, though it all looked pretty muddy to me. "And don't you worry. Looks to me like those bug photographers never go to Munden, so he couldn't get your letters. We'll hear the whole story when State gets back."

"And that will be tonight, captain?" she asked.

"Perhaps so—but late," I told her; and knocking the ashes out of my pipe, I got on to my feet. The sun had already dropped below the mangrove tops in the west, and I started around the house to the woodpile. But as I turned the corner of the piazza I came to a sudden halt. A large, powerfully built man with a smooth, square jaw and a pair of steely eyes was coming toward me. He wore a cork helmet, was dressed in a khaki hunting-suit, and carried a shotgun in the hollow of his arm.

He bowed, and his eyes traveled over the landscape.

"Not very good shooting over here," he remarked.

"No, not very," I agreed, looking him over. "Once in a while we plug a 'gator in the creek over there, if he gets to bellerin' so loud he's a nuisance. After birds?"

"Yes," he says, and the smile he cracked made me half suspect that he wasn't. "And just tramping around. I suppose you're the station-master."

I told him I was, and we walked over to the edge of the beach, and stood viewing the ocean. He said he was down from the North to rest up for a couple of weeks, and had hired old Dan Clark over to Munden to sail him around. Dan was coming after him at eight o'clock.

"I thought I'd like to loaf around here for awhile," he said. "I've never seen an outfit like this before. Where's your lifeboat?"

I pointed out the shelter and its runway, and told him this was the House of Refuge. Then I got my spy-glass and let him sweep the ocean for distant craft and steamers. Finally I took him on to the piazza and introduced him to Miss Roberts.

"Miss Roberts is from the North, too," I said, "Mr. ——"

"My name's Calhoun," he said as he took her hand, "James Calhoun of Washington, D. C."

He pulled up a chair and sat down. The girl turned to him with a startled look.

"Why!" she says. "My father lives in Washington. Perhaps you know him, Mr. Calhoun."

"Roberts? What's his first name?" he asked.

"No, not Roberts," the girl corrected. "He's my stepfather. His name is Eben Shackleford."

He turned those cold gray eyes of his on her, and for half a minute it seemed to me he didn't do anything but stare. The girl flushed up, and he looked away, repeating the name of Shackleford.

"What does he do?" he asked.

"It's something with photography, and I think connected with the Government," she said. "Since my mother's death, I've

Digitized by Google

lived in the North with my aunt, so I'm not sure."

"The name sounds familiar," he said, "but I don't seem to recall any Shackleford."

THE girl looked disappointed, and why she didn't say her father was with the bug expedition I didn't understand. But so long as she didn't, I kept mum myself. I left them talking and started back for the woodpile, where I gathered up an armful of splinters and lit a fire in the kitchen stove. Then I asked him to stay to supper.

He accepted, and during the meal and on the piazza afterward, where we sat and smoked, I'd catch him now and again studying the girl with those keen eyes of his. When it grew dark, I lit the lamp in the sitting-room, and as I was doing it, the girl slipped into the room, and up to my side.

"I don't like that man, captain," she whispered. "How long will it be before Mr. Jenks returns?"

"It's hard to say," I told her. "It may be midnight. Then again, he may——"

I broke off, for the hoot of a screech-owl sounded from the inside landing on the creek.

"There he is now," I said. "That's his call, and he's made mighty good time."

"Good!" cried the girl and we started for the door. Mr. Calhoun met us on the threshold, his watch in his hand.

"My boatman is late," he said; but as he spoke, State dashed up the steps and into the room.

The girl followed him closely, and I saw them whisper a few hurried words. Then I introduced our visitor. But the girl's face had suddenly gone white and her troubled eyes were fixed on State.

"Well?" I said.

"It's all right, skipper," he answered, and his eyes dropped to the floor. "I saw the Judge. He's promised to come over at daylight tomorrow morning."

He glanced up quickly and gave me a queer look. I was sure he'd lost his senses, so I just stared.

"The Judge says the surveyors for the new railroad are coming to Munden next week," he went on. "This will be a fine country when we get the railroad through it, Mr. Calhoun."

Our visitor sat quietly measuring State. But before he could answer, a clumping tread sounded outside, and old Dan Clark pushed his head through the doorway. Mr. Calhoun rose and bade us all good night.

"Thank you for your courtesy, captain," he said. "I'll be over again before I go, and perhaps get a shot at that 'gator."

He shook hands with us all, and when he came to the girl he bowed mighty solemn. Then he followed old Dan out of the house.

The moment they were around the corner State sprang into the middle of the room and raised his hand.

"Skipper!" he breathed hoarsely. "There's some crooked work going on here. I don't know what it is—I can't make head nor tail to it, but——"

"And you didn't see my father after all?" the girl broke in anxiously.

"No, Miss Roberts," he answered, and I noticed he didn't meet her eyes. "I couldn't reach the camp—a man stopped me. I'll tell you about it later. But now——" he grabbed up his hat—"I'll show you something that'll open your eyes. Come!"

He dashed for the door and we followed him out of the house in single file, Miss Roberts bringing up the rear. Taking the beaten path to the landing, we branched off a hundred yards or so from the water into an old trail that skirted along the edge of the mangroves, which led to a cleared opening, and a bit of muddy beach perhaps a quarter of a mile from the station. A half-moon sailed in a clear sky above us and lay like a sheet of silver on the open lagoon.

State motioned us with his finger on his lips to step behind a tree, and as I did so I heard a low murmur of voices and the swish of poles dipping the water. Then suddenly three Indian canoes shot from the deep shadows of the timber, followed by old Dan's catboat, with Mr. Calhoun sitting in her stern. As they cleared the arm of the creek and entered the bay, the Indians stepped their jury-masts, and catching the breeze on the quarter they all disappeared around the bend of the key.

State grabbed my arm.

"What do you think of that, skipper?" he said excitedly. "Little Tiger put me on to it. He says this man Calhoun had those Indians meet him here tonight, and is hand and glove with a lot of them. He's over at the life-boat house waiting for us now."

"Who is?" I asked. My brain was swimming just a trifle.

Digitized by Google

"Little Tiger. He's been with me all day," State goes on. "He says there are queer goings-on up to that scientific camp —that one of those bug professors tried to shoot Jimmy Doctor last week, and they won't let an Indian or a white man near the place. It's true, too—a black-bearded pirate held me back with a rifle!"

"But my father!" the girl cried. "It can't be a crooked business!"

We were returning. State nudged me in the ribs.

"Don't you worry, Miss Roberts," he says in a soothing tone, "we'll get to the bottom of this business tomorrow. You'll see it through, won't you, skipper?" he asks me. "That's what I meant about seeing old Faulkner. The Judge promised he'd come over and keep the Station."

"So that was the gibberish you were talking," I said. "I thought it was just a bluff for Calhoun's benefit. Well, if Faulkner shows up, I'll surely go."

When we reached the Station we found Little Tiger waiting for us on the piazza steps. The girl blinked as she caught sight of him rigged out in his headpiece of bright-colored shawls, homespun shirt, and short buckskin breeches.

For the next hour we laid our plans. Miss Roberts fought hard to go, and at last we agreed to it. Anyway, we needed her to identify this stepfather of hers if we ever found him. As for Calhoun, we decided to give him a wide berth on the trip. The girl was afraid of him, and State backed her up. Little Tiger, however, sided with me in thinking him honest.

"Gar!" he grunted, when I asked his opinion just before turning in. "Good friend!" Then he gave a surly nod toward the north in the direction of the expedition camp and grunted again: "Bad friends. Olewakkus! No good!"

OLD FAULKNER was on hand the next morning, and we left at daybreak. We loaded Little Tiger's canoe with stores for three days, and with the Indian handling an eighteen-foot pole in the bow, and State in the stern, that greasy dugout shot like an arrow out of the cove into Biscayne Bay, and, hugging the eastern shore, pointed for one of the arms of the 'Glades.

Here we slowed down, and for the rest of the trip barely crawled—jamming through overgrown creeks, across shallow lagoons, and feeling our way over flooded marshland, bristling with rotten stumps and old dead logs. Seven miles out of the way the Indian guided us to dodge the scientists; so it was the middle of the afternoon when we finally made New River, and slipping into the current, floated down to within three miles of their camp.

We hid the canoe in the river bushes and striking back a hundred yards into a grove of pines threw up a temporary shack for Miss Roberts. This we had nearly finished when Little Tiger, who had been off on a scout, showed up with two other Indians—Jimmy Doctor and Young Osceola. The girl and I were roofing the shanty with green palmetto leaves when State came over to us.

"Skipper, these Indians say the outfit is getting ready to leave," he said.

"How do they know?" I asked.

"It seems they've got a schooner anchored up the river," he replied. "Jimmy Doctor says they've been mending sail and calking her sides all day."

The girl joined us and stood biting her lips impatiently.

"There's no need to worry, Miss Roberts," I said. "They can't get out of the river without passing us."

"But why can't we go honestly to them and inquire for my father?" she asked. "Surely there would be no danger in that."

State shook his head. "I want to know more about this outfit before we butt into it," he replied. "And I think I'll take a skirmish around that schooner. I'll be back in a couple of hours."

The girl said no more. We went back to our thatching job, and the sun was already setting when we saw State coming back through the woods alone.

"The schooner is up there, cap," he says, "but I can't see a soul aboard of her. I reckon they're back at their camp in the 'Glades. I've left the Indian boys to watch."

"They probably sleep on board of her," I said.

"Then why couldn't we call on them this evening?" proposed the girl. "They wouldn't shoot us for asking a question."

"I reckon it won't come to shooting," State smiled. "But how would it do, skipper, for you and Miss Roberts to make the call together? Whoever they are, they'd never suspect you when you explained you

Digitized by Google

merely wanted to find Mr. Shackleford. I'll keep you covered from the river-bank with the Indians."

It seemed a good idea, and the girl instantly brightened up, eager to go. Whatever these men proved to be, I certainly had a good excuse for calling, and my position as captain of the Life-Saving Station they were bound to respect. So I agreed to go.

We made a hasty supper, then carefully stamped out the fire. And on a fresh flood-tide our canoe floated down the moonlit track in the direction of the schooner. A soft breeze astern rippled the girl's dark hair as she sat, silent and thoughtful, on the middle thwart, facing ahead.

Suddenly the shrill screech of the king-fisher pierced the silence, and my heart stood still. I knew only too well what it meant—that warning call of the 'Glades! We were being watched, and by swamp wireless some one had telegraphed our approach.

Then we rounded a clump of mangroves and came suddenly on the schooner anchored in mid-channel. In the vivid moonlight her spars and rigging were outlined as clear as day. Not a soul could be seen aboard. I poled alongside and ran my eye over her deck.

Hurried footsteps sounded in the cabin, and the next moment a head bobbed above the companionway. Miss Roberts had pulled herself up beside me, and together we stood staring with amazement into the cold gray eyes of Mr. Calhoun.

"Well, captain," he said in a stern whisper, "I'm sorry to be inhospitable, but——"

"We've only come to ask a question," I broke in.

"What is it?"

"About Miss Roberts' stepfather," I said. "She believes he's with this expedition, and is anxious to see him. Can we come aboard?"

He sprang on to the deck and stood peering down on us.

"What!" he cried. "Is this true, Miss Roberts?"

"Yes, sir. I feel sure he is here," the girl answered.

He swept the river up and down with a quick glance.

"Come aboard for a moment," he said. "You can't stay long, but I'm interested in this."

He held out his hand to the girl, and we both scrambled on deck and followed him into the cabin, where he remarked that the moon was light enough, and cautioned us to speak softly.

"Why do you think your father is with these men, Miss Roberts?" asked Calhoun.

The girl explained.

"Shackleford, you said the name was, I believe."

"Yes, sir."

"There are five men connected with this —expedition," he said, after a moment, "but no one of them is named Shackleford."

"Are you sure, Mr. Calhoun?" Her voice trembled.

"Positive. Did your father's friend give you the name of this party?"

"No, sir," the girl answered, "except that they were a group of scientists, located near Hillsboro' River."

"Each member of this party is a known and marked man, Miss Roberts. Believe me, there is no Shackleford here—and no scientists, either."

At his last words I felt the blood creep into my neck.

"Look here, Mr. Calhoun," I said, "just how do you fit into this——"

"THIS expedition, captain?" He took me up. He stepped quickly up the companionway and stood listening for a minute, then came back.

"I'll tell you in two words; then you must both hurry off," he said softly. "You're in danger here. These men are a criminal gang with a noose around each of their necks that only needs tightening, and I'm here to set the lashings taut. I say this to relieve Miss Roberts—there is no Shackleford in this party. Look!" He unbuttoned his vest, and pinned to his shirt I caught the gleam of a metal badge in the moonlight. "I belong to the Secret Service."

"You will arrest them!" the girl exclaimed. "There is a miserable mistake somewhere. I feel it, Mr. ——" But Calhoun's warning gesture stopped her.

"Hush!" he whispered and again sprang up the companionway. Once more came that weird, warning screech of the king-fisher, and from the depths of the 'Glades I heard it repeated again and again. The girl was on her feet, swaying against the cabin table. As Calhoun dashed down the

Digitized by Google

steps we caught her between us. She had fainted.

"Quick!" he whispered hoarsely. "They-'re coming. You must hurry off. Here!"

Together we clutched and attempted to lift the girl up the steps, but it was too late. We could hear approaching the faint, almost ghostly headway of a canoe. We hurriedly laid the girl on her back against the cabin wall.

"We're trapped, captain!" Calhoun snapped, and coolly passed me a Colt's revolver. "Now it's a case of fight! They've tampered with my Indians."

As he spoke the last word, I felt the nose of a canoe softly touch the vessel amidships. We drew quickly back into the deep shadows on either side of the moonlit patch that lay on the cabin floor, and waited.

I clutched my revolver in a sort of daze. I am not exactly a fighting man, but the consciousness of the helpless girl stretched on the floor, and my responsibility for her, set my jaws hard. Stealthy sounds, faint and muffled, came to us from the deck. In a whisper I warned Calhoun that they were creeping up to the companionway in their stocking feet.

He nodded, but kept his eyes glued to the moonlit space above us. Then there came a sudden, soft pad behind me, and I thought the ceiling of the cabin had crashed on my head. Shots rang out—my revolver rattled to the floor, and the last thing I vaguely remember was hearing another screech of the kingfisher in the depths of the 'Glades.

I came to with a start. My head was splitting. I was lying in a bunk, firmly lashed, and as I opened my aching eyes they fell on four men seated at a table above which a smoky oil-lamp swung from the ceiling, saturating the cabin with a fetid, yellow haze. Strapped to a chair against the wall sat Calhoun, his jaws rigid and his eyes like burning green stars in his chalky face. Then I saw the girl spring suddenly from some shadowy recess—her hair down her back and her eyes blazing—and I remembered it was her voice I must have heard, as in a dream, just before I came to.

"Cowards!" she cried, holding out her fettered wrists. "Untie me at once!"

The four men gazed at the enraged girl in a cool, interested way, as they might at some curious, caged animal.

"Easy does it, lady. Easy does it," grinned a big, bearded man in a blue flannel shirt and top-boots. "No one's goin' to hurt you. We thought yer might scratch a little—that's all."

"Loose her hands, Joe. She can't do any harm now," ordered a broad-shouldered, muscular individual who seemed to be the leader. "And you cool down, young woman, and give us that pipe once more about your father."

The group all sniggered. The man called Joe cut the cord, the girl shrinking from him with flaming eyes as he touched her.

"There you are, my lady," continued the leader, as she stood freed of her bonds. "Now what I want to know is how you ever butted into this proposition?"

"I refuse to say another word!" the girl flashed. "Mr. Calhoun was right about it. Thank Heaven, it was all a mistake!"

The eyes of the party turned on the Secret Service man, who sat grimly glaring at the group. The leader laughed softly.

"Yes. You've named it, my dear—it was a mistake all right. Eh, Mr. Cal-hound?" he jeered. "For this time the hound ran into his own hole! You better change your name, Jim," he jibed. "Setter dog would suit you fine. That's right.

"But honest," he leaned forward and peered at his captive under black brows, "did you think for a minute I wasn't on to this Indian game of yours? Why, they're a lot of kittens! A couple of white friends of mine in the 'Glades are worth the whole tribe."

He rose to his feet and stood glaring down on the Secret Service man.

"You're a nosey old dog, for fair! You struck the trail in Brooklyn, New Orleans, and the Blue Ridge, but you couldn't sniff strong enough. Well, your trail ends here, Jim Cal-hound. You'll keep your muzzle out of my path after this; you can gamble on that."

Calhoun made no reply. The girl sat on the steps of the companionway, her head on her hands.

The leader calmly lit his pipe and beckoned to a thin, sharp-faced man at the table. "Better take the canoe back now, Ricky," he said. "Decker's got the stuff ready by this time, and you'll have to make three or four trips of it. As soon as this tide turns I want to get under way."

The man rose to his feet, but in the same second something happened so volcanically

Digitized by Google

that my eyes blurred. A figure darted past my bunk from the forward hatch and stood swaying from side to side in the center of the cabin, a blue-black Colt in each hand that waved and circled, and described erratic orbits.

"Hands up!"

At the bellowing command eight hands shot upward.

"Face the wall!"

THEY all whirled; but to the mind of Bill Bassett, the leader, there suddenly leaped the fact that here was one man against four, and he took a gambler's chance. As he swung, he drew, and firing directly from his hip the bullet scorched State's ear and crashed into the wall behind him. But the explosion was echoed by another and Bassett spun around with a broken arm.

"Face the wall!" yelled State. "Keep 'em up—higher, higher!"

This time they all obeyed save Bassett, who raised his single good arm. And then for the first time I seemed to come to my senses, and realized that Little Tiger and Osceola had jumped down the companionway and were backing State with leveled rifles.

Strapped hand and foot in the bunk, I had been staring pop-eyed at this electrical panorama. But now I saw Little Tiger cutting the cords from Calhoun, and I called to Miss Roberts.

"Oh, I'm so glad, captain," she gasped weakly, as she slashed my bonds with Osceola's machete. She was on the verge of hysterics, and I forced her to sit down and tried to calm her. Then I helped the others truss up the four scientists. We sat them around the table like so many corded bales of humanity, glaring and sullen. Calhoun grasped State's hand and nearly shook it off.

"You've saved the day for me, Mr. Jenks," he cried thankfully. "They got on to my signals through their outlaw friends, and mixed my Indians up. I'll swear those boys were true. A Seminole never yet broke his trust."

"Kittens, kittens!" sneered Bill Bassett. "You make me laugh. And now what d'ye think you're going to do, Jim Calhoun? Where's your evidence—hey? You haven't got the goods on me, and you can't get 'em, you big flat-foot, any more than you did in the Blue Ridge. You're a proper imitation—you are," he taunted. "I'll have Decker half way to Whitewater Bay before you can move. And eighteen regiments of your Secret Service hounds 'll never dig him out in twenty years!"

He jerked back his head suddenly and let out the familiar screech of the kingfisher, which he followed up by three hoarse caws of the crow. Then he leaned forward and glared venomously at Calhoun.

"Now get busy, Mr. Smart Aleck," he sneered. "And you better tap a live wire. You'll need it."

But Calhoun's only move was to coolly strike a match and light a cigar. The cabin still echoed the shrieking reverberations, and State and I stared at each other in amazement while the girl sat white and trembling. The Secret Service man merely shook his head and smiled, as he watched the smoke rings over his head.

"Nothing doing, Bill," he said quietly. "This is where you throw your hand down. I've chased you and your counterfeiting gang for three years now, but I've nipped you at last, and I've got the goods on you. Yes! The whole plant!" He stopped, and a dead silence fell. We listened breathlessly to the swish of a canoe on the river, and murmuring voices that could be heard approaching.

"I believe that's Decker now," remarked Calhoun softly. "I'll go on deck and meet him." State and I started to follow, but he waved us back.

"No," he said. "You two keep your eyes on our guests."

He disappeared up the companionway, and we waited nervously, our ears pricked up for the slightest sound. Clutching his revolvers, State stood on the lower step of the stairs ready to dash up at the least sign of trouble. But the sounds that came to us indicated merely a conversation carried on in the usual tones of friendship. Then we heard a light laugh, and then another, and the next second Bill Bassett was on his feet. Every vein in his red, swollen face stood out like purple whipcord.

"Tricked, by ——!" he bellowed.

"Shut up, you beast!" roared State.

Calhoun returned shortly. With a whispered word to State he led him over to the girl who was sitting with her head thrown weakly back against one of the bunks. She allowed State to place his arm about her, and meekly followed him up on to the deck. Then Calhoun beckoned to me.

Digitized by Google

"It's all right, captain," he said under his breath. "But I can swear it's as big a surprise to me as to any one. He's her stepfather, after all!"

"What do you mean?" I said, amazed.

"This man——"

He nodded.

"Yes—Decker! Hear that?"

Panting sobs came to us from the deck—sobs choking and hysterical, which soon changed to grateful moans, and happy murmurs of relief. It sounded as if she were weeping on his shoulder. And so she was.

"Yes, he's one of us," he went on in a low voice. "I never knew him before he went on this job, but he's a wonder. The Chief in Washington introduced him to me as Decker—he evidently didn't want to use his right name, you see. But he's Shackleford all right. And, captain—" he glanced over to the group of ferocious, wonder-struck faces around the table—"he's accomplished the finest and most dangerous bit of work here the Service has seen in years. And all this would have been lost, I'm afraid, if it hadn't been for your friend, State. Listen to that!"

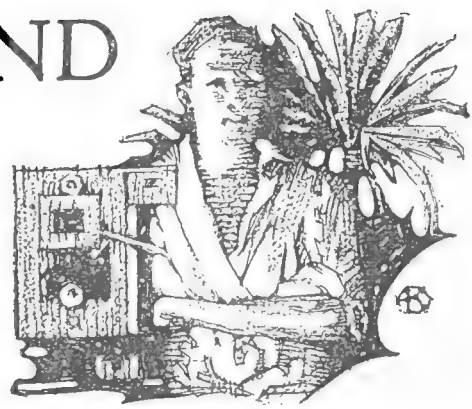
Laughter came to us now from the deck, and the sound of footsteps moving toward the companionway. Then I heard a voice say—

"That's right, sir. It's only a few miles from Kennebunk. A little place called Saco, up in Maine."

"WELL, that's about the end of the story," observed the captain, "and yet not quite. In about a month I'm going to hang the girl's picture side of that one up there on the mantelpiece. And I think I'll label the two of them—State o' Maine."

CONTRABAND

A HOLY HOLLY STORY



By
Gordon McCreagh

Author of "Featuring Morton St. Clair," "The Brass Idol," etc.

A YOUNG MAN, sun-tanned and stockily built, stood on a little strip of hot, white sand fronting a wide mile and a half of lukewarm river and backed in by the thickest of steaming green jungle. He peered with eyes like a good-humored hawk through the telescopic view-finder of a very efficient-looking moving-picture camera, while he slowly cranked the panoramic head of the tripod from side to side, boldly but with obvious unfamiliarity.

At length he straightened up and mopped his brow, positively sizzling with heat and surplus energy, and walked over to where another man lay long and limp in the sweltering shadow of a ridge of red-hot rocks, alternately sweating in streams or chattering his teeth with shivering ague—and reviling him equally well in either condition.

"Looks all right to me, Herman," he remarked pleasantly. "I can see enough river to pull off a naval battle in. We'll get a dandy picture."

But the sick man only snorted in inexpressible scorn and disgust, and turned over and muttered appalling things under his breath.

And yet, any one out of a random selection of a million young men who could have looked down on that scene, would have unhesitatingly declared that the invalid had no cause for complaint, and would have willingly taken over the whole contract—

Digitized by Google

—heat, fever, flies, and all—for the sake of the ministering angel who chased away the myriad crawling things and fed the irascible one from time to time with fresh coconut milk.

A perfect vision of an angel, with a cameo profile and an appropriate halo of curls of Titian red—which again is the red of the great tropical flying squirrel. The kind of vision which any of the yearning million would have declared to exist only in Heaven and on a moving-picture screen.

But the inappreciative sick man only vilified his interlocutor and growled:

"Dandy picture, shucks! What do *you* know about pictures? You'll only spoil fourteen dollars' worth of perfectly good film. That's what."

At all of which the young salamander in the sun grinned imperturbably. He knew from private experience just what a hundred and fifteen in the shade, aided and abetted by jungle fever, could do to an otherwise equable temper.

"I'll take a bet that I get a peach," he offered with easy confidence.

This was Jim Holly all over. It was characteristic of him in every way. Not so much for his own careless confidence in himself, as for the surprising faith he inspired in other people. For it is the first article in the religion of moving-picture people that camera operators are beings apart, of superhuman qualities and age-old experience. And here was Holly, acting as the self-appointed emergency camera-man of the Motioscope World's Tour Company.

HE HAD descended out of Heaven on the helpless company but a few weeks before, when they had been brought to a deadlock by a more than usually impossible difficulty, and his amazing knowledge of matters Oriental had cleared away all obstacles with such ready invention and swift adaptability that Crandal, the traveling director, had appropriated him permanently as a special *deus ex machina*.

In the present instance cables from home were clamoring for about a mile of film—and Herman, the camera-man, had succumbed to the inevitable fate of the white man in the tropics! But the cables of a big film syndicate, which placards New York streets in advance with thrilling posters designed by a clairvoyant artist, may not be denied; and it was imperative to the frenzied director to produce the required mile, corresponding more or less remotely to the inspired posters at home.

Into this crisis Holly had stepped with his customary assurance.

"Say, Chief," he drawled, "I've watched Herman grinding his organ a whole lot, and I guess I can turn the regulation two per sec. if he schools me up a bit on its intestines."

The harassed director stood up as if he had stepped on a live wire.

"Hey, what?"

The idea had never even entered his head. But even while he opened his mouth to ridicule it, its plausibility began to grow on his mind. This man certainly had a way of accomplishing things. He took a long breath and looked at Holly sideways, like a lean, gaunt game-cock.

"Jove!" he snapped at last. "I almost think you could. What do *you* think, Herman?"

Herman, lying in one of the tents, nearly exploded with indignation at the bare suggestion that a mere mortal could handle his beloved "boxes;" but Holly's calm reliance had already communicated itself to the director. Accordingly he had borne the indignant Herman, in spite of blood-curdling protests, out into the shadow of the rocks "to supervise," and was now waiting for Crandal and the rest of the party to arrive into the picture in a native boat.

It was to be an opium-running scene out of a gripping drama in which Miss Helen Redfern, the aforesaid angel, who was more familiarly known as the "Red Squirrel," portrayed a superhumanly noble and devoted Burmese maiden, who went through sundry paralyzing adventures with savage men and wild beasts, regardless of natural geography, and finally rescued and reformed her lover, a bold, bad opium-smuggler; all with a dash and sublime self-sacrifice that was surely calculated to thrill the five-cent intellects back home to their very heart's core.

A PAIR of saffron-robed *hpongyis*, or Burmese priests, drifted silently down the jungle path and halted to regard the little group with dispassionate, unquestioning eyes. The ways of the white men were lunatic and inexplicable at all times—what business was it of theirs?

Digitized by Google

But the Red Squirrel, bubbling over with friendliness and an almost childish interest in everything new in that land of amazing inconsistencies, tripped forward and greeted them with the only Burmese she knew.

"*Bé hni yaung ma lé?*" Which means, "What price is it?" and is the first requirement of one who roams the bazaars with an insatiable love for pretty curios.

The *hpongyis*, of course, had nothing to sell; but they smiled at the vision with grave courtesy—and entirely forgot to hide their faces behind their great palmyra fans, as is prescribed by the monastic code when in the presence of maidens. For which sin their good abbot would surely impose a scorching penance later. But penances were a matter of routine, rendered innocuous through long association; and this astonishing girl was exhibiting an interest in them which was most flattering.

"Oo-h!" she squealed. "What perfectly heavenly silk they're wearing! *Bé hni—Bé*—Oh, *Bé* - something - or - other." She knew that "*Bé*" was the interrogative prefix in Burmese. "Oh, do ask them where they get it, Ji—er—Mr. Holly. I've never seen anything half so gorgeous."

Holly was gazing tensely through the view-finder, slowly turning the cranks to "get a center" on something far out on the river.

" 'Jim' was correct," he sang out into the bowels of the machine. Then he flashed a glance over his shoulder. "All right, I'll get you some, Miss—er—Red Squirrel," he promised with hurried audacity—"Looks like our crowd 'way across there."

And this again was characteristic. Holly knew that it was perfectly impossible for a layman to get hold of any of the sacred saffron weave; but his careless assurance was always entrapping him into such promises, which he would afterward accomplish the most incredible difficulties to make good—however small the matter. Which, after all, is not such a bad sort of promise to make. And since in this case the Red Squirrel wanted it!

"Oh, will you really?" the Squirrel enthused. "I just adore yellow silk. You're so good, Mr.—er—Jim."

The saucy flash from under the soft lashes was adorable, but it was lost to Holly. The girl knew nothing about the impossibility of obtaining the stuff; but it made no difference. Holly had said it. It was enough.

A TYPICAL *hlé-gyi* with a huge bulging sail was now slanting swiftly down the river. A squat and clumsy-looking affair, built of seasoned teak planks, not bolted but *sewn* together with cane fiber, which squeaked and creaked under way as if on the point of instant disintegration, but none the less slipped through the water at an amazing speed.

The Red Squirrel stepped out into the glare and clapped her hands in appreciation of the pretty picture the craft made. The high stern of carved be-tinselled teak glittered in the sun, careening slightly before the wind, and positively bounding forward under the sturdy strokes of the big sweeps which brawny bronze adepts worked *standing up*, with one hand and one leg crooked round the shaft.

Then she gave another squeal of surprise, this time, as another vessel, long and low, shot from behind a projecting sand-bank and hurled itself after the first in a splendid foaming curve like a gleaming white projectile. This was evidently a masterly afterthought of the director.

"Good for Crandal!" muttered Holly. "He's staging this like a Hippodrome production."

"Pan her!" yelled Herman. "Get that power-boat in. Steady-y!" The voice broke in a cracked falsetto.

But Holly was already turning the panoramic crank slowly with the left hand, while the right continued at a steady two per second. The power-boat overhauled the other rapidly, and a man in the former stood up and gave strenuous directions with a huge megaphone, the gist of which could not be distinguished above the appalling creaking of the native craft, which notwithstanding looked as if it would win in the race.

Then a puff of white smoke spat wickedly from the bows of the pursuing vessel.

"Oh, gorgeous!" shouted Holly, and danced behind his machine, causing his sweating instructor to shout "Steady!" again; and at the same instant a thin whine sang through the air high above them.

Holly sobered down suddenly and looked up with a quick frown. He had heard that sound before, on more than one tense occasion.

Digitized by Google

"What the ——!" he muttered. "—— fool trick. You can't rely on the trajectory of those Snyder carbines at any time."

Another puff of smoke came from the distance and was followed almost immediately by the inconceivable racket directly behind them that a bullet makes in passing through leaves and small twigs.

An indefinable change came over Holly's face. There was just the merest tightening of the lips and an almost unnoticeable contraction of the eyebrows, and the perpetual smile had set in a fierce wooden mask.

"Here, get behind those rocks, you!" he snapped at the girl by his side.

"What for?" she questioned, rebellious at once at the tone.

"Some fool is using ball-cartridge over there. Quick now!"

"Well, but if you can stay—" began the girl, and then Holly snatched time to turn and look at her.

At the expression on his face—one which she had never seen before—she went, raging inwardly and vowing that she hated him, while she did not understand why she obeyed. This carelessly good-natured young man had suddenly become grim and domineering.

Another puff of smoke—the vessels were quite close now—and something kicked up a spurt of sand not ten feet from the camera.

"You'd better come in, Holly," Herman forced himself to say, though it broke his heart to think of the glorious picture he would lose.

Holly's teeth gritted together.

"—— if I will! But wait till I get my hands on the big stiff in that boat!"

In another second the shallow-draft *hlê-gyi* ran a third of her length up the bank in a flying smother of foam and sand, right into the camera's eye. The boatmen yelled and leaped like apes, and the big sail came down with a rush—and Holly turned with unvarying rhythm while Herman hopped like a tumble-bug on his bed of hot sand and adjured him to "keep it steady" in a crescendo scream.

Right on the heels of the first came the power-boat, shooting alongside with a superb exhibition of steering by a monkey-faced, shriveled man, dressed in blue with a red sash, a lascar *serang;* and immediately a dozen khaki-clad figures leaped like great toads on to every available clinging point of the other vessel and swarmed all over her with much yelling and waving of guns. It was all very life-like and realistic, and Herman chattered his teeth and whooped in the intervals with joy.

A WHITE MAN, large and meaty, flopped from the white speeder into two feet of water and waddled ashore, where he brandished revolvers and hustled the native boatmen with signal valor, till a lean gaunt game-cock of a man, very tall for a Burman, who seemed to be having epilepsy, seized him by the collar and shook a bony fist under his nose and frothed at him. And Holly reeled it all in with a slow grin of comprehension beginning to relax the tense corners of his mouth.

The plethoric white man backed away before the onslaught. Such conduct from a native was unprecedented—the man must have gone mad and might bite. Immediately four or five of the khaki warriors leaped to their chief's assistance and dragged the gaunt man to the ground, where he methodically put three of them *hors de combat* before he could find his voice.

"Go—gosh——itall! What the—what the Hellen Blazes d'you mean by firing at us, you purple-faced diplodocus?"

The voice spoke in the purest of perfervid American.

At this undoubted speech of the dominant race the khaki men leaped away, such of them as could, as from something uncanny.

It was the heavy-jowled white man's turn to become apoplectic.

"Hyar, I say, you know. Reahly now," he stammered.

He was beginning to be aware of the camera and other appurtenances and was commencing to realize that things were not altogether as he had thought.

"What d'you think you are, anyway?" demanded the gaunt man aggressively, rising to his feet and thrusting his face close up against the other's wavering guns.

The meaty party backed some more. He was quite defenseless in the face of this belligerent anomaly, both his hands being occupied with his obviously unaccustomed Webleys.

"I—I'm the superintendent of excise," he managed to pronounce; and then, with a bull-frog-like attempt to resume his dignity, he puffed out his cheeks and continued, "And reahly, my good man, I was within

Digitized by Google

my rights. Why didn't you stop when I called?"

"Why didn't I stop?"

The gaunt man raised his hands to Heaven in supplication for fitting speech.

"Great sufferin' snakes! Have I got to waste a mile of film every time a wandering pot-still hunter plays a tune at me on a gramophone?"

"Well, I took you for Moung Hyo's gang running a cargo of opium. You looked just like it, don't cher know."

The gaunt man was mollified sufficiently to begin straightening out his disordered raiment. This was a distinct tribute to his directorial artistry.

"From a distance," continued the tactless adipose—and fell back yet another pace at the sudden fierce contortion of the director's face.

A LOOSE whirring inside the camera and a sudden cessation of resistance warned Holly that he had come to the end of his film, and he stopped winding with a sigh of complete contentment. A full reel, four hundred feet of perfect film, had been accomplished under perfect conditions. The light had been unvarying, and the speed—Herman had timed every revolution—had been as perfect as the light.

The invalid wept in ecstasy and besought Holly to come and be embraced; but the latter only grinned at him and sauntered forward to the center of disturbance. The expression of grim retribution had left his face, and he was the reckless incorrigible once more.

"Let up on the tension, Crandal," he drawled. "It's only the blundering British-Indian Government again." And he poked familiarly in the ribs another man, also rather tall for a Burman, and amazingly handsome, who emerged from the *hlê-gyi* and joined the group.

"But—but these hang-bellied gastropods might have hit us," raved Crandal.

Holly grinned expansively.

"Huh, they were *aiming* at *you*. *I* was the one who nearly got hit."

The plethoric official felt vaguely that he was not showing up to advantage before these self-possessed foreigners, who seemed so completely to have usurped the virtuous indignation which should have been his as a representative of the majesty of the Government in zealous performance of his duty. He inflated himself once again and made another pompous attempt to regain control of the situation.

"As an officer of the excise department it is my duty to investigate all vessels suspected of carrying contraband, and I am authorized by the Government to fire on fugitives at my discretion."

"Beneficent Government!" murmured Crandal.

"And the regulations apply most stringently to opium-runners," continued the fat man in final defense of the shooting, "and to Moung Hyo's gang in particular."

" 'Opium being a harmful drug, detrimental to the welfare of the populace,' " quoted Holly with unction.

"Exactly," said the fat man, rather surprised that this stranger should know so much about official "minutes."

"And incidentally," continued Holly dryly, "so his Majesty's Imperial and Most Christian Government can hang on to its monopoly and sell the same drug at fifty rupees a ball to some licensee who has sufficient pull with the powers that be, and who may then retail it at a fixed price of eighty rupees to the same populace, under the supervision and *restrictions* of the same beneficent Government; the restriction being just how many ounces the populace can bribe the local native magistrate to write down in his permit. Are my figures correct, Mr. Superintendent?"

Holly spoke with unaccustomed sarcasm; but the farcical inconsistency of this thing had always outraged his conceptions of justice. The puffy exciseman hated him instantly with all the venom that a weak man harbors against one whom he feels instinctively that he dare not assault. He was just distending himself preparatory to a verbal—and much safer—attack, when the Red Squirrel rose from behind the rock rampart where she had been forcibly restraining the raving camera-man, and turned somewhat timidly toward the group.

ANGEL'S visits are not frequent in the lives of paunchy officials in the uttermost ends of the earth, particularly angels whose perfections render them worthy of posing as star in the pictures of a leading film company. The superintendent's poppy eyes popped yet further, like a garfish's. He gasped appropriately, and swiftly decided that diplomacy

Digitized by Google

was a course distinctly to be commended.

Holly, who had the observation of a hawk, noted the quick change of demeanor and the preliminary gasp, and poked the tall young Burman Apollo once again in the side.

"Tracy, we've got an accursed rival," he whispered. "Observe the wily tactician."

"Let him be slain," Tracy sentenced enthusiastically. "I leave our vengeance entirely in your hands."

Holly looked pained.

"O crafty ruffian," he murmured reproachfully. "So while I'm busy steering him off, you can steal many marches on me. Nay, son, we abolish him together."

The rivalry between these two was most wholesome and refreshing. There was nothing mean or underhanded about it. Both were too much white men to subscribe to that damnable platitude of, "All's fair in love or war;" and while either understood perfectly that the other was his competitor, they were the best of friends and each played with his cards on the table.

Tracy was the leading man, and possessed the advantage of a longer acquaintance; but Holly waded in under his handicap with the same cheerful insistence that he applied to any object of his desire. The victor—if indeed it should be either of them—would win strictly on his merits; but their friendly competition by no means included the admission of an interloper, and "a swag-bellied official" at that, into the game. He was forthwith proscribed.

But the pendulous plebeian was introducing himself. He was Harrington-Chalmers—he pronounced it "Chawmars"—and he was the superintendent of excise of the whole Eastern Division, with headquarters at Mandalay. He regretted the little incident of the shooting; but "reahly, you know" his men had been on the watch for days to intercept a large consignment of opium which they had positive information was cachéd somewhere on the opposite bank, and which Moung Hyo, the most desperate and cunning smuggler in Upper Burma, was waiting a chance to run across into the Mandalay market.

Crandal was not vindictive. His recent frenzy was only the natural outburst of a highly strung disposition. He was quickly mollified and was preparing to give the other his blessing and let him depart in peace, when Holly approached again with an expression of virtuous indignation cloaking the guile in his heart.

Crandal had engaged him as chief wizard and effect-producer to the company, and he took an almost boyish delight in hunting up ingenious sensations for the pictures. He had just taken a vivid and life-like scene with the unexpected help of Providence, and he was quick to see the spectacular value of a real revenue boat that could make twenty knots. The man's eventual extinction had been decided upon; but the interest of the company Holly worked for was an important consideration according to his ideas of loyalty.

Crandal's benedictions were accordingly brought to a sudden termination by a covert kick on the ankle-bone, and Holly turned a deaf ear to his blood-curdling resentment while he addressed himself to Mr. Harrington-Chalmers with an innocent assumption of condescending forgiveness.

"Well, of course we know you didn't mean to hurt us any; but you really"—he could not refrain from calling it "reahly"—"you really should be more careful what you loose off at. One of your little pills sang by a foot from my ear, and a mere expression of regret wouldn't help much if it had hit—the camera."

It was sufficient. The portly official immediately resented his interference; but he positively leaped into the pit that had been digged for him. His regret was real, he hastened to explain. It went deeper than mere expression; and he would like to give outward and visible form to his contrition by assisting Crandal in any way that lay within his pompous power, either with advice, or even with the use of his launch and his men to fill in any scenes in which Crandal thought he could use them. He smiled expansively at his own astuteness, and nearly forgave Holly. Would he not thereby have excuse to hang about the camp indefinitely?

Holly's face was inscrutable as he turned to Crandal.

"That's awfully generous of Mr. Harrington-Chalmers," he enthused. "I guess you can remodel your scenario to fit in some new scenes; and particularly so we don't lose this last one."

Crandal certainly could; and the producer in him immediately proceeded to take advantage of the superintendent's offer by asking him to pass judgment on the interior

Digitized by Google

economy of the *hlé-gyi*, in which Tracy was next to portray the dashing smuggler-man surrounded by the implements of his hazardous calling, and impress his handsome features on the film, ranging through the whole gamut of heroic emotions.

THEY climbed accordingly into the craft, and the professional contraband-hunter was moved to smile condescendingly. Crandal had done his best; but even a moving-picture producer can not acquire an intimate knowledge of all the appurtenances of a secretive calling in a day, and some of the arrangements appeared ludicrous in the eyes of the man who knew.

It is true that such a trifle as inaccuracy would not in the least mar the satisfaction of the great film syndicate, or of the five centers in far New York; but Crandal was that anomaly among producers who did like to have his pictures true. The exciseman pointed out several glaring discrepancies, though without suggesting any remedy, and finally asked:

"What are these weird little boxes that we're sitting on, Mr.—er—Crandal?"

"They're supposed to contain the opium," Crandal explained uneasily. He was getting nervous about the magnitude of his errors.

The expert gurgled ventriloquiously, and his pendulous wattles shook.

"Ho—ho—ho! That's the funniest thing I ever saw. Reahly, my deah fellow, you've got a confounded lot to change, you know; 'pon my word you have. Opium is never put up in boxes; it comes in packages, you know. All this hasn't the faintest resemblance to a contraband-boat."

But his criticisms went no further than to point out discrepancies. He made no suggestions for remedying them, and his further strictures were interrupted by an insistent outcry from without, announcing that another vessel had been sighted down the river, which looked as if it might be the elusive Moung Hyo.

Even an officer of the Indian Government has to attend to his own business sometimes—particularly when there is a big reward for capturing opium—and Mr. Harrington-Chalmers hoisted himself stertorously out and into his own boat like an immature jelly.

"Awf'ly sorry I have to go," he gasped from his exertion. "Glad I was able to help you. I'll come back as soon as I can, and if there's anything more I can do for you——"

The rest of his amiable offer was drowned in the sputtering roar of the exhaust, as the beautiful speed-machine glided out like a low-skimming gull.

Crandal looked after the long sweep of creaming wake and grunted.

"Help? Huh! Great help he was!" And he turned with the expectancy which was fast becoming a habit, to Holly.

The latter was grinning with the utmost cheerfulness, as was his exasperating custom when difficulties were thickest.

"Could have told you myself that some of those properties of yours were on the blink, Chief; but I'm no expert on opium-running, and I can't *correct* your lessons for you."

"But my dear Holly," Crandal expostulated. "We can't wait a week for that giant clam to come back; they're howling for film back home."

He said no more; but his whole attitude and expression positively oozed the conviction that he relied on Holly to fill the breach. Crandal was losing his individuality. He was sliding rapidly into the easy path of turning to his forceful young assistant in every difficulty.

Holly said no more either. He interpreted the producer's state of mind with unerring exactness, and only grunted. After which he made his way to the little tents which glimmered white through the heavy gloom of the jungle, and shortly thereafter disappeared from the face of the earth.

Crandal threw the load from off his mind and proceeded to occupy himself with the hundred and one minor matters, such as reading up on Burmese archeology and haggling over the price of village goats, which fell within the scope of his job as traveling producer of the Motioscope World's Tour Company. He knew from past experience that when Holly grunted with the deepest disgust, things would be accomplished.

HOLLY was absorbed by the jungle, silent and lost to all communication for two whole days, during which time the fat and infatuated superintendent made a literally flying visit, and Herman recovered sufficiently to reel off several short strips of the speeder speeding, which would be invaluable as inserts later on. And Crandal began to appreciate

Digitized by Google

dimly the subtlety with which the pompous officer of the Government had been lured to labor for the benefit of the film company.

Then Holly returned, travel-stained but triumphant, accompanied by a wiry, alert-looking Burman, whom he had miraculously discovered, and who would be able to give them all the information they required. For, as he said: "Fomerly I wark in Excise Department, Rangoon Division; but now, I trader, rubies, silk, anything."

Silk! The Red Squirrel instantly took an interest.

"Oh, do ask him, Mr.—er—Jim, if *he* knows where it can be got."

"Silk?" smiled the trader. "Ye-es, wat kin?"

"Oh, that delightful rich yellow stuff that the priests wear. I would love to have some; and Mr. Holly says it's very difficult to get."

"*Hpongyi*—yellow silk?" The trader shook his head slowly and pursed up his lips. "Ye-es, the *Thakin* say correc. That ver dif'cul; ver impos'ble dif'cul. That silk, he make with *hpongyis*, only for Seinmyo *hpongyi* wear; other fellow no can get. Ver sacred. That silk, he *contraband* with *hpongyi;* same like opium with Gov'-ment. Only smuggler-man can get."

Red Squirrel's face fell; she had set her heart on the beautiful stuff.

"Don't you think the priests would give me just a little, if I went and begged? Oh, I could just love anybody who would give me some."

"*Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!*" shouted Holly. "The Red Squirrel could just love anybody who would give her some sacred yellow silk. Hear that, Tracy?"

"Well, it don't look as if we need be afraid of anybody," affirmed Tracy contentedly.

But Holly's mouth set for just a second as his promise came into his mind. Then, "Allah is good," he carelessly grinned. "Who knows what he may do for a pious young man."

And the Red Squirrel felt indignant about the way these men openly discussed their hopes before her.

Further dalliance was cut short by Crandal, who was haunted by the ever-present recollection of the insatiable film syndicate at home. The trader was hurried to the *hlê-gyi*, where he showed his undoubted ability by picking out just those discrepancies which the superintendent had pointed out; but with the additional value of suggesting remedies, and where they could be got, or rather where *he* would get them from.

Crandal was delighted with Holly's new find, and disclosed his further plans to him for discussion and advice. The scenario called for a few more scenes on the boat, and a final river scene in which the fierce smugglers came down from the hills, loaded their cargo, and ran it under cover of night —for which reason the film would be made in brilliant sunlight and later tinted green to give a moon effect. After this the setting would be transferred to the Mandalay bazaar. The native was quick to grasp the producer's ideas, and rendered himself invaluable.

"All ri," he said. "I make correc in *hlê;* an then you want plenty hill-mans, ye-es? All ri. After, I take canoe an mak arrange otha side. Hill-mans, he wait for you tmorra, ye-es?"

Crandal had to congratulate Holly on his acquisition.

"Most intelligent native I've met yet," he affirmed.

THE boat pictures progressed apace and were finished to Crandal's complete satisfaction by evening. And with their completion came the white power-boat, shooting up the river.

"Just in time to help us some more," growled Crandal.

The superintendent came, perspiring and effusive, too thick-skinned to understand whether he were welcome or no, and introduced himself into everything as a *persona grata*. The revised boat-fittings had his complete approval.

"That's reahly very good," he commended. "Where did you get it all from?"

"Thanks to your valuable suggestions."

Holly grinned slyly and kicked Crandal unnecessarily hard.

But the fine needle of antiphrasis had no effect on the superintendent's indurated hide. He was firmly convinced that he *had* given valuable advice, and just smiled complacently.

"Awf'ly glad to have helped," he said. "How much time d'you think I've saved you?"

"Only one more picture," replied Crandal. "We finish here tomorrow, and then we go

Digitized by Google

in to Mandalay for the rest—thanks to you!"

The superintendent was overjoyed. It was true that his valuable assistance had not helped him to see much of the Squirrel so far, but he was making headway, and he by no means intended to lose the advantage gained. Would Crandal therefore accord him the pleasure of racing the little company up to Mandalay on the morrow in his launch, in time perhaps for a real Christian dinner at the hotel? He was sorry he could not stay and see it through; but his spies reported unusual activity on the other side and he had to be on the *qui-vive*.

Crandal thought it would be a very good plan; and the superintendent hugged himself for his cleverness.

Early the next morning the trader returned with the pleasing information that he had herded together "plenty hill-mans" of the true opium-running type, at a most favorable spot, where thickly wooded hills ran right down to the water's edge; an ideal place for a stealthy smuggling scene. And soon the big brown sail was bulging out like the half of a balloon as the boat slanted, complaining in every joint, down the river.

Crandal was suddenly seized with a horrible fear. "Plenty mans" was certainly what he wanted; but he had to keep an eye on his budget, and in his joy at finding a man who could relieve him of so much trouble, he had quite forgotten to inquire how much remuneration these "mans" would require. He knew from hearsay that the hill-folk were very independent, and might be inclined to be exorbitant in their demands.

But the trader reassured him with a bright smile.

"That ver cheap, *Thakin*. You see, these mans, they fishing mans. They make bes kin *ngapi* an bring for sell in Mandalay; but Mandalay *hpongyis* always take tribute, wan quater, wan third, for upkeep plenty *kyaungs* and *pagoda*. So these mans, his chief say, if *Thakin* bring *ngapi* back in *Thakin's* boat, then *hpongyi*, he not know; so he make ver cheap."

This was true. Mandalay was overcrowded with a mass of pagodas and hordes of priests, who had to subsist on "voluntary" contributions which they extracted by a very complete system of moral suasion; all of which was a great drain on the country.

Holly was engaged forward, asking questions about the sail—he acquired information instinctively—or he could have told Crandal that the *ngapi* which he was so readily agreeing to freight over on his boat was a delicacy composed of decaying fish and fresh-water shrimps, whose combined efforts assailed the high heavens with an awful and penetrating odor of phosphorated hydrogen.

"So those mans, he pleased," continued the astute trader. "He save tribute. *Thakin*, he pleased; he save money. And—" with a deprecating smile—"*Thakin* pay me small commission on what he save. I ver pleased."

"Gosh, that's high finance," admired Crandal, and let it go at that. He found a keen humor in defrauding the grasping *hpongyis* of their enforced tribute.

AS THEY approached their destination the *ngapi* began to obtrude itself from off shore, and Crandal said to himself that these "fishing-mans" were evidently most unsanitary in their arrangements. But the appalling reek soon sank to nothing more than a subconscious ache in his enthusiasm at *the* scene he had pictured in his mind's eye, and a wild assortment of blood-thirsty ruffians with vicious cutlery sticking out all over them.

Herman joined him in artistic ecstasy and champed with impatience as he set up his machine at a favorable spot on the shore, commanding a steep goat-path which zigzagged up the creeper-festooned rocks. The trader acted his part of super-manager to perfection, and explained his requirements volubly in their own dialect to the ferocious gang, who treated him with marked reverence, as a being apart, of superior intelligence—and, incidentally, their present paymaster.

They were to load themselves with the unwholesome delicatessen, which was put up in cozy packages of palmyra matting and would do very well to represent packages of opium, and carry it down the path with a great show of secrecy and stealth, and load it into the boat in the usual way, led all the while by Tracy, who was their bold, bad chief. This was easy to understand, and needed no great rehearsal.

Tracy waved a splendid silver-mounted *Dah*, or chief's sword, which the trader very opportunely was able to supply, and registered heroic postures as he led his band

Digitized by Google

down the track with a reckless bearing and a waste of time such as no smuggler since the pre-Adamite era had ever displayed. And the hereditary bandits behind him dodged, and peered, and showed watchful suspicion in a manner that aroused Crandal's admiration and enthusiasm.

"Gosh!" he muttered to Herman. "What actors they would make. Look at 'em. No rehearsing, and every man plays his part as if he was born to it. Darn sight better than any mob of dollar-fiftys I've ever seen back home."

The noisome packages were finally stowed with an expertness and silent caution which brought long sighs of delight from Herman, and a half-dozen of the "fishing-mans" with atrophied olfactory nerves perched themselves on top of the suppurating mass. The trader settled up with the crowd to their evident satisfaction, though to Holly's keen eyes he seemed to hand over very little cash, and he must have been making quite some commission even on that end of the transaction.

THE journey back was a two-hour torment, beating back against both wind and stream, while the ancient fish festered in the sun and polluted the whole face of the waters.

"Thank Heaven!" Tracy said. "The wind is blowing against us, though most of that stink is husky enough to fight back. Crandal's the lucky one, he's gone to sleep. So'm I."

But Holly lay on the mat deck with his chin in his hands and gazed at the astute trader through narrowed eyelids, wondering just how much money he was making out of it, and from how many different angles—he was always speculating on and trying to analyze the twists of the Oriental mind. And as he gazed and guessed, his thoughts made him smile in his own slow way; and the trader noted the introspective smile and squirmed uneasily.

When they got back to camp the white revenue-boat was already there, and the bulgy superintendent stood on the bank awaiting them, in company with the Red Squirrel, who had not been in the last picture at all.

Holly trampled violently on Tracy to wake him up.

"The silurian fish has stolen a march on us, Tracy. Coises! Let's let him in on the nosegay anyhow." Then he called, "Come and see the fine cargo of opium we've run, Mr. 'Chawmars,' about a ton of it."

The superintendent approached, unwillingly enough; but he could not afford to be discourteous just now.

"Phew! How it smells! What on earth are you people doing with *ngapi?* Photographing odors?" He cackled raucously at his jest.

Crandal explained.

"Well, hurry up and get into my launch, all of you; we can only just make Mandalay in time for dinner."

But Holly would have excused himself. Somebody would have to stay in the boat and keep an eye on it till they could get to Mandalay and unload their unsavory cargo, since it had been in the agreement; the native crew were capable otherwise of pirating the whole outfit.

The superintendent's face lit with unholy joy; he would have left Holly behind with devout thankfulness. But the Red Squirrel demurred; it would be much pleasanter if they all went together.

"Very well then," agreed the superintendent with a bad grace. "I'll leave one of my own men to look after your boat."

But there was another objection—and Holly smiled his quiet smile. The superintendent's own excisemen would place all sorts of obstacles in the way of landing the fish till their palms should be duly greased, as was the manner of native officials, and the poor "fishing-mans" would rather have fallen into the hands of the *hpongyis.*

"Oh ——!" muttered the superintendent under his breath, and cursed his tormentor.

"All right, I'll order my inspector to stay with your boat and personally see that the precious stuff is passed clear without interference. Will that suit you?"

It certainly would. Holly imparted the information to the trader personally and stepped into the launch, smiling like a Sphinx, though even Tracy thought that he was carrying the baiting of the superintendent a little too far.

But the latter was feeling too happy about the success of his little plan to retain his resentment for long—fat men are as a rule blessed with good nature by way of compensation—and he opened out like a blossoming sunflower and talked incessantly to interest and amuse the Red Squirrel, thereby accomplishing his own damnation

Digitized by Google

unassisted. For, like all slow-witted men, he had nothing to talk about except himself, and bored the girl to extinction.

Only one remark made an impression on any one of his hearers. That one was Crandal, and the remark was such that it engrossed his mind for five hours till he could relieve himself of it.

"By Jove!" the superintendent had said, relating his recent experiences. "That man, Moung Hyo has given us an awful time lately. It's awf'ly difficult to catch him because *we* don't know what he looks like, and *he* knows us and all our ways, for he used to be in the Excise Department in Rangoon."

IT WAS late that evening before Crandal could segregate Holly in his room in the hotel and unload himself of his suspicion.

"Did you hear that?" he demanded. "About that opium chief being in the department at Rangoon? D'you think that——"

Holly's inscrutable smile broke out again; and for answer he took from his pocket a little tube of bamboo which contained a dark sticky mess with an insinuating, acrid odor.

"That came out of one of those packages of *ngapi*," he said. "That gang of brigands did their stealth act a little too smoothly, and our useful friend was a little too authoritative, and the fish stunk a little too much—and I'd heard long ago that the government men usually got wise to opium by its own beastly smell. So I sneaked a chance to investigate."

Crandal looked almost frightened.

"But, man," he expostulated. "Why didn't you tell? Doesn't that make us accessories before the fact, or something?"

"What have we got to do with it?" Holly defended stoutly. "We're no crawling officials of His Majesty's Imperial Government, drawing fat salaries to protect their monopoly. And anyway, I gave him every chance. I called him to look at it himself once, and framed it so his own men would have the handling of it later. If they let it get by, they've got their own official boneheadedness to blame. And besides, I figure we owed our friend a sporting chance for all the help he gave us.

"But say, some slick guy, eh? I'm only wondering just how slick. Whether he thought himself too clever to be found out, and despised us accordingly; or whether he was slick enough to catch on that I was wise, and was trusting to luck and the six gorillas he had with him in case it came to a showdown and a scrap. If he was as clever as that, and as nervy, I take my hat off to him."

BUT Holly's speculations were not satisfied till two days later, when a Burman left a package at the hotel for the "*Thakin* with the eyes of a hawk." A long flat package wrapped in palmyra matting which still retained a lingering aroma of ancient fish.

No, there was no message. Only that his master said the package contained his expression of good-will to the *Thakin* who was his friend."

Holly slit the end somewhat gingerly; and then his eyes sparkled.

"So he knew that I knew," he murmured. "I take off my hat.

"Allah *is* good," he added irrelevantly, and started out forthwith to seek the Red Squirrel.

He found her, by a fortuitous circumstance, alone in the so-called reading-room, and placed the package on the table before her, for it was quite heavy. Then he handed her his pocket-knife, with a wooden face which barely sufficed to hide a faint twitching at the corners of his lips.

The girl regarded it doubtfully and crinkled her nose most adorably over the wrapping, and then she hacked at the binding cords, unhandily, as a girl will, till suddenly the last half-severed cord snapped with the soft pressure from within. The wrapping sprang apart, and roll upon roll of "the most heavenly yellow silk" swelled out in heavy masses!

The Red Squirrel squealed with the delight and wonder of it.

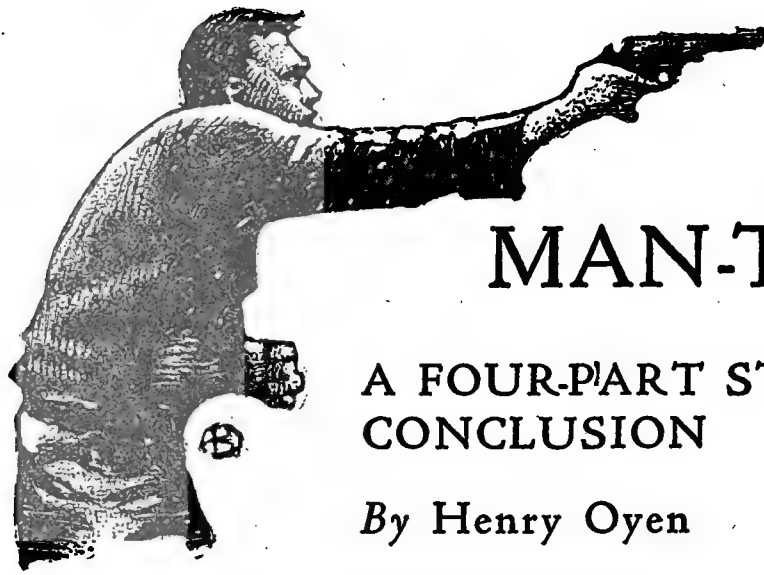
All the raillery had gone out of Holly's eyes.

"Do you still feel that you could just love anybody who got you some of that?" he asked slowly.

The Red Squirrel looked at him, just as a shy squirrel would, and went redder than ever before, till it must have reached her very toes. Then she hid her face in the soft folds and fled to her room.

But she took the silk with her—and Holly just smiled.

Digitized by Google



THE MAN-TRAIL

A FOUR-PART STORY CONCLUSION

By Henry Oyen

Author of "The Snow Burner."

SYNOPSIS:—Hating business and liking the out-of-doors, a failure in the eyes of his rich father, *John Peabody*, big-muscled and twenty, takes a position with his uncle, *"Wolf John" Peabody*, a grim old lumber-king of the North woods. Arrived at Peabody Point, *John* receives a cordial welcome from his uncle's adopted daughter *Belle*, but from *Wolf John* only the gruff information that he must work or starve; that his name thenceforth will be *Jack Mud*, not *Peabody;* and that foreman *Bull Bart* will break him in at Main Camp.

Thinking *John* has found favor in *Belle's* eyes, *Bull Bart* determines to break his spirit and therefore makes him sawing-partner with champion-sawyer *Norby*. But the latter takes a liking to the newcomer and helps him bear the strain of those first back-breaking days.

John learns they are about to move camp to the King Pines, a primeval tract held on a one-year lease by *Wolf John*, but desired by the disreputable gang at Whisky Landing in the employ of the Trust. *Norby* hints at *Bull Bart's* desire to wed *Belle* and inherit the Peabody interests, and *John's* blood starts boiling.

John gains the friendship of old *Nels*, the teamster, who warns him against *Bart*. Returning to Main Camp on Christmas Eve, after dinner at Peabody Point, *John* saves the life of *Bart's* mistress and from her learns *Bart's* real character. On the next day, in *Bart's* absence, *John* takes temporary command at Main Camp, saving the Company's property from depredations at the hands of drunken employees.

At a camp-dance the same night, *Wolf John*, as a reward, introduces *John* as his nephew. After encouraging the attentions of *John*, *Belle* refuses to marry *Bart* who thereupon goes over to the side of the trust, after denouncing *Wolf John* publicly and promising trouble if the King Pines are touched. At this, young *John Peabody* is given *Bart's* former position as boss.

Bart impedes the work of logging the King Pines by having whisky secretly pedled to *John's* lumberjacks, thus causing a series of fatal accidents, and by winning over many *Peabody* lumbermen to the *Lowry* camp on Spirit Lake. The kidnaping of *Belle* by a gang from Whisky Falls furthers *Bart's* cause, for news of the outrage brings on *Wolf John's* long expected attack of heart-failure, thus incapacitating him for active commanding. *John* rescues *Belle*, takes supreme command at the King Pines, and, by capturing a number of *Bart's* whisky-pedlers and forcing them to work, wins public sentiment over to his side, whereupon from all the North Woods pour into Peabody Camp loggers, enemies of *Bart* and the Trust, anxious to engage in the impending struggle.

CHAPTER XXIX

MID-WINTER

AND NOW mid-Winter clamped its icy hands upon the Big Woods and held them in a grip remorseless. The world gave up its fight to appear a living, pulsing thing and lay stiff-frozen and dead, numbed under the pressure of thirty below. Each day the mercury dropped a little lower, each day the mastery of the frost devils became a little more stern. The sun, too far away to reach earth with its heat-rays, shone brightly, a ball of light which, save for a brief space after noon, was helpless against the frost-pall which covered the woods

In the woods the snow lay crystal-like, white and hard, unsoftened by the sun's

Digitized by Google

best efforts. On lakes and rivers, beneath the snow, the ice lay flint-like. The ice-road through the Pines was a ribbon of gray steel from which the long, sharp calks of horseshoes struck showers of tiny, brittle splinters.

It was mid-Winter. Wolves, bobcats, lynxes gave up their nightly meat-hunting and slunk to their caves, curling themselves up, waiting impatiently for the days when the sun, drawing nearer, would warm earth to a degree where living things once more could walk abroad. In the brush the spruce-hens burrowed deep in the snow beneath the cedar bushes, and the deer, close-huddled for warmth, grew lean in the bare swamps where they yarded.

Out-of-doors was an enemy to man. It fought him the moment he stepped out from the shelter of four walls. It leaped upon him, striving to clog the blood in his veins, forcing him into brisk motion to keep the mere breath of life in his body.

In the morning the men came from the warm bunk-house into the biting cold, swore, thrashed their arms and ran to the cook-shack. From the cook-shack they ran to their work in the woods, the stables or the roll-ways. To stand still was to freeze, to let the frost devils win. To work at top speed, burning the heavy-fuel meals under forced draft, was the one way to make outdoor life endurable. From their work the men ran back to camp.

A few of the younger, incredibly endowed with animal spirits and resistance, frolicked as usual, rolling each other in the snow, jeering at the one who admitted frost-bite. The majority of the crew, however, hurried for the shelter of four walls and the warmth of fires without delay. Mid-Winter had laid its icy hands upon their spirits as well as their veins.

"She's going to be another hard one," they said as they greeted the cold in the morning. And, "She was a hard one, all right," when the harsh day was over.

Those are the days—when all out-of-doors is a place to flee from the moment work is dropped, and many men must herd together without entertainment through hours each day—that tempers grow frayed and sullen in logging-camps, and short words, blows, and even worse are to be expected as a matter of course. Then, if ever, the camp boss is tested to his marrow. Upon his ability to dominate the rough men under him, to note and quench trouble before it breaks, and to keep his men satisfied when dissatisfaction is the natural state of mind, depends the success of the job, even his own life and the lives of some of his men.

The Canadian poet-logger, Dr. Drummond, who made it obligatory on the successful applicant for work in his camp to answer affirmatively at least one of the four questions: Can you sing, play any instrument, dance a jig, or spin a yarn? knew well what such accomplishments meant to the frost-bound camps.

In this respect John was as good as any dozen men in camp. He could tinkle satisfactorily on the old guitar, and he could sing songs by the hour. The whisky-peddler captured by Norby turned out to be a really excellent story-teller, and on Dugan's flaming head rested the honor of being called "the best two-handed liar in forty miles." Each night John sought to have something going in the bunk-house immediately after the men had gathered from the evening meal. Yet even his watchfulness did not wholly avail.

One evening a shot brought him rushing furiously in to see one crowd of men holding a man in his bunk, while another sought to conceal the rifle that had fired the shot. A dropping of dust from the board ceiling told that the barrel had been knocked up in time.

"Accident," they said. "Pete's gun went off when he was moving it."

Another time he rushed in at the sound of voices raised in curses, and found two men rolling on the floor, struggling for a long knife. Fist fights were common. Brackett and Norby fell out one night over a mild argument concerning what became of the antlers shed by bucks and it took half the crew to keep the two Titans apart and half an hour's hard talking on John's part to make them shake hands. Men began to lay up silent grudges against one another, all of which were to be settled when the drive was down and they met in town. But—they got out the logs.

IN SPITE of the cold which slowed the blood up and made the muscles stiff, in spite of the feuds and grudges growing daily among the men, the work of converting the King Pines into saw-logs went on at a satisfactory rate.

To fight the cold weather and beat it was

Digitized by Google

a matter of pride with the lumber-jacks. They were Snow Country men; they knew that no man has any business in the North who can not whip the frost devils; and they increased rather than lessened their efforts when the bone-searching cold would have driven less hardened men to hug the fire. Their fighting and bickering they reserved for the idle hours after the evening meal; they never allowed their feuds to interfere with the day's work. A man might be bent over a saw, knowing well that his best enemy was working behind him with a sharp two-bitted ax in his hands, but he pulled away undisturbed, knowing well that the enemy would not use the ax, at least not until the job was done.

It was his load-tally sheet that kept John strong through this trying period. Each day he awakened with a fear that before the camp went to bed again the raw tempers of the men would bring about a tragedy. Each day he sensed that his hold on his men was not the hold that he had held when the weather was more pleasant and the men in their normal mood of friendliness and good nature. They were not working their best now for loyalty to him, but because they had fallen into the habit of giving the best that was in them. Their attitude toward him no longer was one of chummy respectfulness. He was the Boss now, and the Boss only. And the lines grew deeper on the sides of John's mouth as he realized how slender was his hold, and that once it was broken the camp would be a bedlam of discord, rupture and ruin.

By day he watched the men closely, and he wondered at his success in keeping his sway over them. But at night, when the load-tally came from the roll-ways, he had his moment of triumph. For each day was a success. He was doing what he had set out to do. The ice-covered Brulé was being slowly but steadily choked with logs from bank to bank.

In the Pines the cut-over portion grew each day, like the falling of wheat beneath the harvester's scythe. If he could keep this up he would succeed. To succeed now had become an obsession with John.

The isolation of the camp, the absolute concentration on the task of making big trees into saw-logs, and of getting the logs on to the river ice, had done its work. There was nothing in the world but logs; nothing in the world for him to do but to get them out before the ice-roads broke up under soft weather. Bart and Wah Song and the gang from Whisky Falls had ceased to trouble. They were far away, and the trees and the cold were present. So John was completely wrapped up in the fight against the harsh, frost-bound forest.

"If we don't get soft weather before the tenth of March, we've got it beaten," he confided to Nels one evening in the office. "I have figured it out to a day. At the rate we are going we'll be within skidding distance of the river by March tenth."

"If Bart don't horn in," supplemented Nels drily. "Have you heard the news? Curly Joe's started hunting again."

"What of it? You're hunting every day, aren't you? You've been looking for a shooting-match with him for weeks."

Nels shook his head.

"I guess you've been too busy to hear any news at all, eh?" he said. "Why d'you suppose Bart's been letting up on us? Think he's afraid? Think he's quit because we've beat him so far? Huh! If you do you don't know Bull Bart. Bart has got another grudge besides the one against the old man, now, and he's more set on settling that than on earning the money Lowrey's paying him to put this camp on the skids. He's out to get you, Bart is, boy, and he never went after anybody yet that he didn't get."

"What's this?" said John. "Have you heard something new?"

Nels nodded.

"One of the boys heard it when he was up to the Falls. He didn't want to say anything to you, of course, but that's the talk up there. Bart's drinking harder than ever. He says it wouldn't do you any good even if you should get the Pines down, because he's going to get you, whether he stops this job or not. I knew that, after you'd put the laugh on him."

"I expected it," agreed John, "but I didn't think he'd go talking about it."

"Too much red liquor," said Nels. "Even Bart can't keep a steady tongue when he's hitting it up the way they say he's doing now. What are you going to do about it?"

"Take care of each day's trouble as it comes. I've thought that over long ago. I don't see anything to do but to wait for his next move and try to beat him, the way we did on the whisky-pedlers."

"Well, I see something to do," snapped Nels. "I've been doing some thinking, too.

Digitized by Google

Will you give me leave to clean Bart and his gang up, for good and all? I've got the way; just you say 'go ahead.' "

"What would you do?"

"What would I do?" repeated Nels hotly. "Why, I'd just whisper a word to the boys about Wah Song trying to steal Miss Belle, and they'd go up there and string Wah Song and Bart up and burn the place to the ground. That's the sure-shot weapon you've got against Bart. I know the boys; I know what they'd do if they knew. Say the word, and tomorrow morning there won't be any gang left up there—they won't be nothing."

A load seemed lifted from John's shoulders as he listened. The thing was solved; he had the weapon to wipe the enemy out of existence. He knew well that what Nels said was true: the men would wipe out Whisky Falls as a nest of vermin if they knew of Wah Song's attempt to kidnap Belle. A man might do many things in the Woods, but that was a lynching proposition. It would solve the problem; the job would be safe.

"No," said John curtly, "I won't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because if Bart's out to get me, that's his fight and mine," said John. "And another thing, I don't want Miss Peabody's name brought into this at all."

"It's the sensible thing to do," persisted Nels. "Bart won't be squeamish about such things, you can bet on that. Curly Joe's arm is well again. Well, Curly Joe can't get at Wolf John, because he's sick in bed, but he might get at you. Now what do you say?"

"That your job in this camp is to shoot venison and take care of Curly Joe," replied John. "As for the rest—that's my look-out."

"But, boy—to talk plain—Curly Joe will shoot you on sight, without giving a chance for your alley, if he can."

"Well, you're not to give him a chance, then," laughed John. "I've got enough confidence in your shooting, Nels, to be pretty brave."

Nels shook his head.

"It ain't the way to do," he growled. "The other's the way. But you're as stubborn as Wolf John himself when you set up to be, so I suppose you'll have your way. You pack your gun all the time now, don't you?"

"Oh, yes."

"Huh! You'll see the day yet when you won't talk so careless about that. And remember, if you ever stack up against Bart, watch his hands, and nothing but his hands; watch 'em like a cat, because he's quick with one as the other."

"How many times have you told me that now, Nels?" said John with a smile.

"Never mind. I'll keep telling you until there's no need for it any longer."

"And when will that be?"

"When Bull Bart has quit making tracks on top of this earth."

John laughed as he always did at Nels' blood-thirsty predictions, but he realized that what the little man had said was quite true. Bart was his implacable enemy. Bull Bart, bully of the Big Woods, could be depended upon to do but one thing to the man who had made the woods laugh at him as John had, and that was to kill him.

John did not take the time to consider fully the significance of this situation. He was so obsessed with his fight to succeed in the position in which his uncle's disability had placed him, that everything else was of secondary importance. To put the job through, to make the King Pines into sawlogs, and to get the logs behind the Peabody booms as Peabody timber, that was the purpose of his existence for the present.

After that—well, after that there were several things to be considered, things which he scarcely dared think of lest they loosen his grip and make him less able to fight his fight. At times his thoughts ran back to Peabody Point, to the house on the hill, and to Belle. But he put these thoughts away and threw himself like a wild man into his work.

CHAPTER XXX

CURLY JOE STRIKES

AN UGLY story drifted down from the Falls one day. Bart, in a drunken fury, had killed a man. To let the thing blow over he had deserted the Falls for Spirit Lake. John gave a sigh of relief when he heard the story. With Bart away the gang probably would lie quiet.

And then Bart, through Curly Joe, began to play his cards.

Ever since word had come from the Falls that Curly Joe's arm was well and that he

Digitized by Google

had been seen hunting, Nels had made it his special care to keep close to John as he made his rounds of the crew. Each morning he arose before the rest of the camp was awake and at daylight he made a half-mile circle around camp, his sharp eyes searching the snow for tracks that might betray the presence of an enemy lurking within striking distance.

When John started out to inspect his line of sawyers, Nels went ahead, keeping himself out of sight, but never relaxing his vigilance until John had gone back to camp. While John was busy in camp, Nels devoted himself to his meat-hunting. There was no opportunity for Curly Joe to prove his marksmanship on John without first shooting it out with Nels.

One evening Gavin, who, with his arm in a sling now, was driving the tote-team, came staggering through an incipient blizzard into camp on foot two hours after he was due with his load. He was all but frozen helpless, and it took heat and rubbing and much black coffee before he was able to speak.

"They shot th' team on me!" were his first words. "One shot—*bang!* an' they both lay dead in their tracks."

When he became coherent he told his story.

"It was about four miles down—down below the forks where the branch goes up to th' Falls. It hadn't started storming then. I was givin' 'em a bit av a rist to git their wind on top of the hill, the team standin' with their heads down and me fillin' me poipe. There wasn't a soul in soight, the saints help me. *Bang!* From th' roight av th' road it came far off, a roifle, and th' nigh horse goes down in his tracks, an' th' off wan rares up and cries and falls on top of him. Not a soul in soight, th' saints help me.

"I couldn't b'lave it! I got down an' looked. They're both av them shot through the necks clean as a whistle and both av them too dead to skin. I run into the woods toward where the shot come from—I did so. I was ravin'! Look here—" he thrust out his heavy woolen cap and showed the high peak of it neatly bored by a bullet—"I stopped then. Suppose I'd had th' cap pulled low on me head? 'Tis a curse on me, I'm thinkin'; first poor Donovan, an' now th' poor horses. An' I never even see th' devil that did it."

"No need to see him," said Nels. "That's Curly Joe's work. The hound, to go shooting horses!"

The men, especially the teamsters, growled and cursed. Like all men who work with horses they had an instinctive hatred for the man who wantonly maims or kills one. The tote-team was a pair of big, sleek bays, steady, gentle horses that had been in the Company stables for many years.

"Well, boy, what do you say about it now?" asked Nels, coming close to John. "Curly Joe's got working. What are we going to do—stand still and take what he hands us?"

"We're going after that load," said John quietly. "Lavin, hook a team heavy enough to haul the tote-sleigh on to the light sleighs. Boys, who wants to take a ride in the storm?"

A score of them clamored for the chance. John selected three besides Nels, and in a few minutes the sleigh started from camp, every man bearing his rifle.

"Not that there'll be any chance to use 'em," said Nels. "Curly Joe won't be hanging around that load. He was back to the Falls as fast as he could leg it after the shooting. That's where we ought to be going."

HIS prediction proved correct. The sleigh stood as Gavin had left it. The horses lay in a tangle on the pole, for Gavin with his broken arm had not been able to take the harness off them. By the light of lanterns the men searched the falling snow for tracks. No one had approached the load, not even the wolves had yet overcome their fears sufficiently to fall upon the feast of horse-flesh that lay waiting for them.

John directed the removal of the stiff, frozen bodies from before the sleigh, and when the new team was hooked on ordered the drive back to camp to begin at once. The men were disappointed. They had hoped that the Boss was going to hold somebody to account for the destruction of the team, and in spite of the blizzard they started back grudgingly.

"First thing we know they'll be coming down and shooting horses in the stable for us," complained the teamster. "I suppose we'd say 'thank you' if they did. We ought to——"

Digitized by Google

"You ought to keep your head shut," snapped John. "I'll attend to what ought to be done about this."

While the men were outwardly raging he was outwardly calm. The sight of the dead horses had driven him into a fury fiercer than that of any teamster in the crew, but only in that his black brows were drawn tightly together and his lips a thin, straight line might his anger be read. The men were outraged at the spectacle of faithful dumb workfellows and friends slain in their helplessness and trust in man; but John held himself in and was deadly calm because he saw that the time for settling his fight with Bart and his gang had come.

It had to be done. This thing had to be stopped and revenged. He was not particularly moved at the brutality of horse-killing at that time. Later on that came. For the present he was so wrapped up in running the job that he considered only one phase of the situation: If Curly Joe took to shooting horses he would cripple the camp within a week—if he wasn't stopped.

The road back to camp lay straight against the blizzard. The snow—small, frozen pellets—was driven like bird-shot against their faces. The wind, howling, whining, shrieking exultantly, strove to force itself through their mackinaws, to reach their bare bodies, to lay its icy hand upon their hearts. About them the wind grappled with the trees and sought to throw them to the ground. Dead branches were wrenched off with a crack and went whistling through the dark night, missiles of the cruel storm. But like giants, confident of their strength, the pines swayed easily, growling their ridicule of the gusts that assailed their trunks.

That was the North! Cruel and relentless, whipping the weak out of existence, permitting only the strong to survive. The old law of the open, wind-swept spaces. John sensed it as he rode, glooming over the problem he faced. The issue was fairly before him. Curly Joe had to be stopped; and Curly Joe had thrown the gage: get me or I'll get you. That was plain.

But John was not sufficiently hardened, not sufficiently in tune with the hard creed of the North to contemplate the taking of human life without a qualm, no matter how just the affair might be. But Curly Joe had to be stopped, else it was for himself to flee from the Woods a failure. And there was a certain reason why he couldn't do that.

CHAPTER XXXI

A SECOND TRIP TO WHISKY FALLS

"NELS," said John quietly, when they had reached camp and the men were taking the load indoors, "come into the office a minute. I see," he went on when they were alone, "that we've got to put an end to this thing or it'll put us out of business. We will have to go after Curly Joe. I won't have any of the men laying off to do it; you and I will be plenty."

"You don't have to mix up in it at all," Nels growled promptly. "Just you stick in camp here and I'll go up and get him tomorrow."

"No," said John, "I don't want it done that way. I just want to stop him, that's all. Understand? If we can get hold of him, you and I, we can drag him down here and keep him locked up until we get a chance to get him to jail on the charge of killing those horses."

Nels shook his head as he listened.

"Boy," he said, "you've got a lot to learn about the woods. Put me out in the timber, and do you think anybody could get near enough to take me, especially if I knew they'd be out looking for me? Well, Curly Joe's 'bout as good a woodsman as I am. 'Get hold of him!' Why, boy, we couldn't get within rifle-shot of Joe without him knowing it."

"Not in the timber," agreed John. "But he probably isn't as watchful up at Whisky Falls."

The old man's eyes drew down to pin-points. "You mean——"

"Tonight, in this storm, they won't be expecting visitors up at the Falls. They'll probably be celebrating on account of Joe getting the tote-team. Two of us, with shot-guns, ought to be able to hold them all up if we took them by surprise. Bart's away. If we can lay hands on Curly Joe we can drag him with us. With him out of the way they won't bother us, not until Bart gets back, at least. And even Bart'll think twice before starting anything new if we get away safely with Joe. What do you say?"

Nels held out his hand.

"That's about the stiffest thing I ever

Digitized by Google

heard tackled in these woods," he said, "but I'm with you, boy."

"All right, then. You round up a couple of pump-guns and some shells. You needn't let any of the boys get wise. Put the guns in the cutter and come back here."

When the camp was asleep, John and Nels went to the stables and quietly harnessed a driver to the cutter. Old Lavin was curious, but John directed him to go back to his bunk and cease worrying, the horse would be back in the stables by daylight next morning.

They drove out of camp slowly and quietly, having taken the bells from the harness, and took the ice-road to the river. At the river they turned north, gave the horse his head and drove pell-mell through the storm for Whisky Falls. They did not speak except in monosyllables.

It was weather in which one held his head low against the storm and kept his mouth closed tightly. A short distance below the Falls they turned the horse into a sheltered angle in the bank, double-blanketed him and tied him securely.

From the bottom of the cutter, where they had been sheltered from the snow by the blankets, Nels drew two repeating shotguns. In the darkness he manipulated them to reassure himself that they worked smoothly, and that each held one buckshot cartridge in the barrel and five in the magazine.

"All right," he said, handing one of the guns to John, and they started on foot to complete their journey.

When the lights of the evil settlement gleamed before them, like pin-pricks in the darkness of the storm, they stopped and lay flat down in the snow.

"Too far away," said John presently. "We'll go closer."

Crouched and silent they moved forward to the very edge of the clearing in which the settlement stood, and lay down again. They could now make out the separate buildings in spite of the storm. It was a dull night at the Falls. There was no rattle of music, clink of glasses, nor the sound of laughter.

"We picked the right kind of a night," whispered Nels. "Their dogs will all be indoors in this weather."

"We've got to find out which place Curly Joe's in," John whispered. "Are there any windows in the back of those buildings?"

"No."

They lay silent a while.

"Come on," said John, "we'll have to take a chance."

Close to the ground and with their guns ready, they started to cross the open space. They were half-way across when within Wah Song's a hound suddenly gave tongue. The keen scent—or perhaps a sixth sense—of the animal had told him that something alive was approaching.

John and Nels dropped flat in the snow. After a while the door opened at Wah Song's and a man looked out. He stood for a moment silhouetted against the yellow light of the room, and John stiffened to his toes as he recognized the twisted form and murderous countenance of Curly Joe.

"Nah! Nuthun' there," grumbled the man in the doorway. He swore at the dog and then closed the door.

"Well?" whispered Nels.

"We're in luck," said John. "Come on."

They crawled forward almost under the eaves of the building. Then together they arose, threw open the door and leaped in, their two shotguns pointed before them, sweeping the entire room with their wicked, black muzzles.

"Hands up!"

"No tricks—hands up!"

John spoke first, Nels' words followed like a grim growl on his command.

THERE were six people in the room. Behind the bar, to the left, stood a bartender; at the end of the bar with a big cigar in his mouth lounged Wah Song; a woman in a red dress stood near him; at one of the faro tables the dealer was rolling a cigarette; at the right of the room, near the stove, stood Curly Joe, and a young Indian squaw sat a yard away. Wah Song, with John's gun squarely on him, and Curly Joe, covered by Nels, thrust their hands up instantly. The others followed suit. Even the stump of Wah Song's right arm went up.

"No tricks," repeated John, as his eyes swept from one to the other. "We haven't come here for trouble. We've come here for Curly Joe. You shot my tote-team today and you've got to come with us and stand trial. Don't try any talking," as Joe's evil mouth opened. "We've come to get you. Don't any of you move. Nels, go over and take him. I'll watch the others.

Digitized by Google

Keep your hands up. Go ahead, Nels."

Wah Song's broad face, though his single hand was high above his head, was as expressionless as when on a busy night he sat on his platform, pump-gun at hand, and dominated the crowd.

"You no want me go 'long, too?" he asked lazily.

"I want you to stay right there with your hand up, and——"

The room suddenly roared with a shot as Curly Joe leaped behind the squaw and fired twice between the rungs of the chair at Nels. John saw Nels drop to his knees like a man whose legs are cut off, fired his load of buck-shot into Curly Joe's pistol-hand as it thrust forward for a third shot, pumped in a fresh cartridge as he swung back to cover Wah Song; then something that seemed to weigh a ton struck his left side and threw him to the floor.

He was dazed, but not unconscious; he saw that Wah Song had sprung behind the woman in the red dress and fired. He saw the Chinaman's big face peering from behind the red dress. He tried to cover it, but it drew back out of sight.

A yellow hand with a big revolver in it licked out and fired at him as he rolled and tumbled across the floor toward the woman. He caught the hand that held the revolver.

He jerked Wah Song from behind his shelter, and then a shot-gun roared behind him and Wah Song came tumbling over him like a sack of grain.

"Steady, you other fellows, steady!" It was Nels' voice warning the bartender and faro-dealer.

John heaved Wah Song off and staggered to his feet. He felt deadly sick and saw things as through a fog. Wah Song was lying on his face; Curly Joe's hand was blown off at the wrist; the bartender and the faro-dealer held their hands aloft. All that was quite right.

He looked at Nels. The little man was still on his knees. He struggled in vain to rise, and there was a look of surprise and helplessness on his white face, but he held his shotgun ready, like a hunter, holding the bartender and dealer helpless.

"Hit, boy?"

Nels did not take his eyes from the men he was watching. John picked up his gun. The movement brought a throb of pain from his side.

"Not to count," he said, stepping to Nels' side. "You?"

"Nothing," said Nels. "Hurry out, boy. Run for your life. The whole settlement'll be swarming in here. Run for the cutter!"

"You?"

"All right. Run, boy, run!"

"Can't you get up, Nels? My God! Why don't you get up? You—you're hit in the legs?"

"Get out—get out!" Nels screamed, but he kept his men covered. "I can hear 'em coming. Boy! What you doing? You can't—you're crazy! Get out alone!"

John threw him over his right shoulder. Holding his gun in his left hand, he backed swiftly out of the door.

"You —— fool!" spluttered Nels. "Put me down and run for it. You can't make it this way—here they come!"

Men were running up from the other buildings. John backed slowly away, menacing them with the pump-gun.

"Turn around!" cried Nels. "I can shoot over your shoulder. Run for it before they get us surrounded."

John turned and ran, staggering blindly into the storm. If he could only cross the clearing; if he could only reach the timber! Nels' gun boomed close to his ear. He heard a cry and the sound of splintering glass. Only a few steps more now. Again Nels fired. John reached the shelter of a big pine and stopped, panting, as a flare of shots came from the buildings and bullets thudded into the tree-trunks around them.

"You fool! Put me down! You're crazy, boy, plum crazy!" cried Nels.

He fired two swift shots across the clearing, and, behind the big pine, slipped in fresh cartridges.

"You had a chance alone—you'd have made it. Now they'll get you—they'll head us off."

John fired once at a flash near one end of the settlement, and a second shot full at the door of Wah Song's.

"Now then," he said, when he too had reloaded.

He picked Nels up again and ran farther into the woods, keeping trees between himself and the clearing, as much as possible. The firing from the buildings broke out afresh.

John stopped again, and shooting from behind trees, he and Nels sprayed the clearing with buckshot. Again he lifted

Digitized by Google

his living burden and again ran forward into the woods.

The shooting from the buildings stopped abruptly. John sought a big tree, deposited Nels safely behind it and leaned weakly against the trunk, gasping for breath. He was sick—wretchedly sick to his stomach.

"You fool!" growled Nels as John vomited violently. "You're hit—you're hit hard, and you wouldn't go away."

JOHN recovered himself presently. His body was throwing off the shock from the bullet and his mind was clearing. He understood that he had been shot in the left side, but he also realized that the wound could not be serious enough to be immediately disabling, else he could not have carried Nels.

"We got to get to the horse," he said doggedly. "We'll be all right when we get to the horse. Which way is he?" he asked, bewildered by the storm.

"Right straight to your left," said Nels. "Now you hoof it alone—as fast as you can run."

Once more John picked him up without a word and started on. The snow beat against his eyes and made the going dangerous. He ran into trees, stumbled over windfalls, stepped into pitch-holes. He stumbled and fell once, and a shriek from Nels told that he had struck on one of his broken bones.

"Put me down; find the horse alone, anyhow," begged Nels; and John stumbled on with him without replying.

"We'll be all right when we find the horse," he said over and over again. "We'll get you patched up quick, then, Nels."

In the darkness he found the river-bank. He located sheltered spots one after the other that seemed to be the one in which they had tied the horse. But there was no sign of horse or cutter there, and he went on.

"Here it is," he said, at last recognizing the spot by a large rock.

He hurried on. In the darkness and storm he could see but a yard or two ahead, so he went toward the tree where the horse should have been tied, groping forward with his hand.

He found the tree. Soon his hand found the rope wound double about the trunk. Then he found what was left of the hitch-rope. A piece, perhaps a foot long, was dangling in the wind against the tree.

John placed Nels carefully upon a sheltered rock.

"Nels," he said quietly, "our shooting must have scared him. The horse is gone!"

CHAPTER XXXII

THE IRON THAT WAS IN HIM

WITH the snow-wind howling about them, the two looked at each other without outcry, without speaking for several seconds.

"Well, you see you'll have to leave me anyhow, now," said Nels quietly. "Follow the tracks; the horse'll go home the shortest way there is. Don't waste any time; go ahead. I'll have to stay here—till the boys come after me. So long, boy."

He had given his hand as a pledge in the office that night, but he made no sign of offering it now. A curt nod and "so long," that was to be his parting. John sat down beside him to get out of the wind.

"Don't talk like a —— fool," he said gruffly. "Where are you hit—are you bleeding badly?"

"No," growled Nels. "No bleeding. The bones of both legs—below the knees—they'll be down here looking for us as soon as they get their nerve back," warned Nels. "You're young, boy; you've got a lot of life before you. Don't be a fool any longer. You can't carry me any farther, and you've got to get yourself fixed up——"

"Oh, shut up!" growled John. He was thinking. "I've got it," he said, as if speaking more to himself than to Nels. "Nels, give me your big skinning-knife."

The knife was handed over without a word. John prowled the river bank until he found a young tamarack about an inch and a half in diameter. The heavy blade made short work of hacking the sapling down and he soon returned to Nels, dragging the heavily branched tree behind him.

"I can't carry you, but I can pull you, I guess," he said, as he picked Nels up and laid him carefully on the boughs. "You showed this trick yourself, when you showed me how to pull a deer into camp without a sleigh. As long as you're not bleeding, we'll make it. Will you ride there all right? Just lie right still and we'll be all right."

Digitized by Google

He was working rapidly as he talked. He took the piece of rope from the tree and spliced it to his heavy belt. They made a rope more than six feet long. One end he tied securely to the butt end of the tamarack, the other he threw over his shoulder.

"All right," he said, and started to drag the little tree and its load down the river toward camp.

His left side was stiffening. From the hip to the armpit there was a numbness over which he had no control. It was not cold; he had not begun to freeze yet.

He was feverish. He opened his mouth and let the icy snow flakes blow in. He scooped up handfuls of snow as he went and filled his mouth. The stuff froze his tongue for an instant, melted, and left him with a feverish thirst. His head began to whirl a bit, but he pushed on.

The little tree and its little burden pulled strangely heavy. He couldn't understand. The yielding branches made practically a natural sleigh. It ought to slide easily. He had hauled a two-hundred-pound buck that way at Main Camp. Nels didn't weigh much over a hundred. Perhaps the storm was making the slipping bad. Well, he would have to make the best of it, and he pushed on.

It wouldn't have been so bad if it hadn't been for the storm. He had never known of a blizzard like that before. One minute it blew icy cold and made a fellow feel chilled and dead all over; the next it was full of fire and made a fellow so warm that he wanted to tear off his mackinaw and gasp for breath. He couldn't do that, however. It wouldn't be right. He was supposed to be doing something that he needed his mackinaw for. What was he supposed to be doing, anyhow? He stopped to think it over.

"Give it up, boy. You go ahead. I'll be all right. You make for camp as quick as you can."

The sound of Nels' voice cleared John's senses as wind clears a fog.

"You all right, Nels? Ain't getting numb are you? All right. We'll make it easy."

He went on again, head down, bending against the rope over his shoulder.

The rope began to irritate him. It was fighting him, trying to stop him, even trying to pull him backward. Queer how a little rope could pull so. But it couldn't beat him. No, sir! He'd fight it to a finish. He'd fight it forever. All he had to do was to keep putting one foot forward all the time. Yes, the rope was pulling back so hard that he'd have to give up walking the way he had been. His left leg wasn't playing fair. It was getting numb, like his left side, and it wouldn't step out as it ought to. Well, his right leg was all right. He could hunch along sideways, right leg first, right leg first, dragging that numbed left one.

"For God's sake, boy! Stop!"

Who was that talking? Oh, yes, that was Nels. Of course. What was he whimpering about now?

"What are you whimpering about now?" said John, as if prompted to speak by something deep within him. He was all right. "I'm all right."

Yes, he would fight that rope to a finish. It was getting stronger all the time, but it couldn't beat him. He'd keep pulling forever. Forever. That was it. There was no end to this; he couldn't remember that it had had a beginning. Right foot forward, right foot forward, dragging his left leg, hunching along, through the storm and the darkness, forever and ever, amen!

"Boy, boy! Are you blind. There's the roll-ways—to your right there—swing to your right!"

Swing to his right. All right. The rope was talking. It was his Boss. It could make him swing to the right, but it couldn't make him stop pulling. No, sir; not even if it did make him swing to the right and go up the steep bank.

"The ice-road—right there, boy, to your left. Can't you see?"

To his left this time. All right. He had to obey. He couldn't think for himself—or talk—or see. All right. But it couldn't make him stop! No, sir, not even if it did send him up the slippery ice-road, not even—he slipped and fell flat on his face on the gray ice of the logging-road, and that was the last that he remembered of that night.

But he did not stop. He rose up, moving weakly, and leaned against the rope. Something drove him on even after his consciousness was gone. He hunched forward inch by inch as he had been going for the last mile. His body moved without any directing intelligence. Moved on and on while Nels, helpless on the tamarack, whimpered and wept. And still on and on. And

Digitized by Google

so at last, just as the day was breaking, he came hunching into the camp clearing, dragging his load, and stumbled and fell at the feet of his men as they were coming out from breakfast.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE FINISH OF WHISKY FALLS

IT WAS the sting of warm water on his side that finally aroused him. He did not open his eyes, but as if in a nightmare he sensed that he at last was in a warm place, that men were standing around him and that one of them was washing his numb left side with warm water. The water pricked like a thousand needles. He raised his arm in pain and his hand fell heavily on the floor.

"He's coming to," said a voice. "Now bring the blankets here if you've got 'em good and warm. That's the stuff. Now we'll roll him up in 'em, tight and warm."

John had the sensation of being lifted, of being laid down again, and of having something warm wrapped around him. He struggled with the terrible weariness and weakness that held him so helpless and managed to move his lips.

"Nels?" he murmured faintly.

"Nels is all right, Boss. Don't worry; Nels is all right. So are you. We're going to take you both down to the Point to the doctor. You'll be all right, Boss."

It was some time before the meaning of this seeped through the pall of weariness into his mind. He felt himself lifted again. He was being carried. He felt the cold outdoor air on his face, caught the jingle of sleighbells, and then he understood. They were taking him away from camp; they were going to take him to the Point. He opened his eyes. Norby's beard was directly above him. Norby was lifting him into the sleigh. John suddenly raised his head.

"Hold on! Where going?" His voice was stronger.

"We're going to take you and Nels down to the Point—to the doctor," said Norby. "You'll be——"

"No. I don't go there."

"That's all rignt, Boss." They were humoring him. "You'll be all right——"

"—— you!" shrieked John, struggling in Norby's arms. "Can't you see I'm all right. Take me to my bunk. Take Nels down to the doctor. I stay here. Come on; don't you hear me?"

They paused.

"You got to——"

"Take—me—to—my—bunk." He spoke slowly. "I am all right. I know what I'm doing. Go ahead with Nels. After he treats Nels bring the doctor up here. Do you get that through your thick heads? Or do I have to——"

He struggled to throw himself on the ground, but they held him firmly.

"No, no! That's all right, Boss. But—but——"

"Who's Boss here?"

There was no need for them to reply. He was Boss, even though he was helpless in a roll of blankets.

"Then do as I've told you," he said, leaning back. "And hurry down with Nels. Right away!"

He closed his eyes again. He felt that they were carrying him toward his bunk.

"Nothing else to do." He heard them mumbling to each other. "Drive like ——, then, Lavin, and bring the doctor back as soon as you can."

He heard Lavin drive furiously away. He felt warm air again on his face, heard a door slam behind him, and then he resigned himself blissfully to repose in his bunk where the men had placed him.

A terrible thirst awoke him at intervals during the day. He groaned and raised his hand, and always Dugan was there, Dugan and his red head, a pale, worrying Dugan who occasionally found it necessary to wipe a troublesome moisture from his eyes, lest some one come in and fancy he had been crying.

"Here y'are, Boss—water—right here."

John did not open his eyes. He allowed Dugan to raise his head without making any effort to aid him, and when the water was held to his mouth he drank as if his life depended upon it. The water was good, and it was cold, but it could not quench the fire that was burning within him.

THE day passed. It grew dark in the room and a lamp was lighted. John felt that he was being moved again. Something was being done to his side. Why couldn't they leave his side alone? Wasn't it enough that a fellow had a hole in it?

Digitized by Google

"That's 'nough, Dugan," he muttered. "Stop it."

"We'll be through in just a few seconds, Mr. Peabody. Just lie still a few seconds longer, please."

That wasn't Dugan's voice. John opened his eyes.

"Oh! H'llo, doc'," he mumbled, as he recognized Dr. Dean's white beard. "How's Nels' legs?"

"Nels is doing very nicely." Dr. Dean certainly had a good voice for a doctor; made you feel that everything was all right. "Now, if you will just let us turn you a little farther, Mr. Peabody—there, that's it. Now, just sip this—that's it."

The draft that the doctor held up to him wasn't cold. Yet, somehow, it seemed to reach and quench the fire burning within him. Also it made him feel so peaceful, so comfortable, so sleepy. The doctor continued to speak softly, but John did not hear. He was enjoying the first moment of perfect comfort since Wah Song's bullet had torn his side. He was peacefully and quietly asleep.

Daylight, broad daylight when he awoke. The low-slanting Winter sun was in his eyes, and the camp was quiet. He started to rise, but a twinge in his side warned him and he lay back on the pillow. He remembered what had happened.

"Dugan!" he called.

"Right here, Boss." Dugan was sitting at the head of the bunk, and he leaped eagerly to John's side.

"What time is it?"

"Just after dinner, Boss; the crew just went back to work."

"Huh! Have I slept that long? I suppose the job's all shot to pieces by this time. The crew all working?"

"You bet they are, Boss."

"Heard anything from Nels?"

"Only what the doctor said last night. You heard that. Gee, Boss!" Dugan was breathless from awe. "That certainly was logging some—you snaking him into that camp through that storm with a big hole like that in your side. You certainly are——"

"Shut up!" growled John. "Have you heard anything from the Falls?"

Dugan's freckled face actually grew serious for an instant.

"Yes-es, Boss, we heard something from the Falls," he said haltingly.

"Have they been bothering any more?"

Dugan did not speak at once.

"Bothering? No; you bet they ain't been bothering," he said slowly. "They're through bothering, those Whisky Falls fellows are. They won't hold up any logging in this camp, not any more. You see—you see, Boss, there ain't no Whisky Falls left!"

"Wha-a-at!"

Dugan ducked his red head rapidly.

"Not anything left up there—not anything but burned timbers, and a lot of broken glass laying 'round in the snow," continued Dugan.

"You see, Boss—you see, yesterday afternoon, before the doc' come, you—you had kind of a fainting spell, and the boys they—they thought it was all off with you. Nels had told all about what happened up there, so Norby he says to Brackett: 'They're still up to the Falls, the gang that did this,' he says. Brackett he says: 'All right, Norby,' and the two of them go to the bunk-house and load a couple pump-guns.

"Then Norby says to the crew: 'The gang up at Whisky Falls has put the Boss out of business,' and then him and Brackett they hike out together without saying anything more. Then the boys knew what he meant and they jumped and got hold of all the guns in camp, and some who couldn't get guns took axes, and Burns, the big slob, took my rifle away from me because he didn't have any himself, and I had to take an ax, too. There was about fifty of us went; the rest stayed here in camp.

"Norby and Brackett they was in the lead when we got to the Falls, and the dogs began to bark and they opened the doors and looked out and saw us. So Brackett and Norby ran to Wah Song's and the rest ran to the other places—fifty of us they was—and we come across the clearing and hit the doors about the same time.

"Norby tried to make me go back, but I smashed in the door of Wah Song's just the same. Wah Song, he was dead already, you know; Nels had put him out of business, and they had him up on that platform where he used to sit. Curly Joe he tried to shoot Brackett with his left hand, and Brackett laid him out with one kick.

"Norby must of went kind of crazy when the two bartenders pulled their guns, because he didn't think of shooting but just

Digitized by Google

took his gun by the barrel in one hand and went over the bar and smashed 'em cold, both of 'em. He got hit three times, Norby did, just winged, but his right arm wasn't touched and he's pulling saw all right today. Brackett got hit in the foot when he was choking the faro-dealer, and then the other boys come rushing in and we had 'em licked.

"I didn't see what happened, because Norby wouldn't let me come when they rushed Curly Joe out in the woods, but pretty soon they come back without him. Then they went to the stable and hooked up the two teams they found there and made them all get into the sleighs, the women and men, about a dozen there was altogether, and they started 'em off to the edge of the clearing and stopped.

"By that time the boys had got together all the kerosene they could find and sprinkled it all over the buildings. There was about ten barrels of alky and whisky in the back of Wah Song's, and they smashed them up and let the stuff run on the floor. Wah Song was laying up on the platform all the time.

"There was a wind from the west, so Norby goes to that end of the buildings where they'd broke up a barrel of kerosene over a lot of kindling wood, and he sings out: 'Everybody out?' 'Let 'er go!' says the boys, and Norby touched 'er off.

"Gee, but she did burn quick! I never see anything like it. She just seemed to blow right up. Brackett waited until the buildings was all going, then he says to the gang in the sleighs: 'You can go now. Take a good look at that fire so you'll know better'n to come back. An' tell Bart what happened to Curly Joe and Wah Song, and that he'll get the same if he ever shows his face around our camp. Giddap; get out of here,' he says.

"Then they drove away on the jump and they didn't say a word. We had to get back into the timber on account of the heat, but we waited until the roofs fell in and the walls went, and there wasn't anything left of the Falls but piles of red logs. And then when we got back to camp the doc' was here and he says you were going to be all right. But we'd done the job then. There won't be any more bothering from Whisky Falls, Boss. We put them out of business, because we thought they'd done the same by you."

CHAPTER XXXIV

TO THE END OF THE JOB

FOR a mild old gentleman, Dr. Dean was in a bad temper when, two days later, he returned to camp to inspect his patient and found him, with a crutch under his left shoulder, bossing the crew on the roll-ways.

"If you were only a lumber-jack, without intelligence enough to appreciate the importance of absolute rest after what you have gone through, Mr. Peabody," said the doctor, "I would have nothing to say. I presumed that when I left orders for you to remain absolutely quiet on your back until I saw you again you would have sense enough to obey. If I hadn't, I certainly would have had you strapped down.

"Rest, man, rest! You drew on your vitality till the bank was empty on that trip that night. Your nerves are dead; you're as thin as a rail. You ought to be put in an asylum for insisting on remaining in camp. Go back to your bunk and rest; I insist upon it."

John laughed nervously.

"Rest—rest?" he exclaimed. "Why, doctor, the hardest work I ever did in my life was to lie in there for a whole day without being able to see how the job was going. Rest? There's no such thing on the program for me until this job is on the ice."

"You'll put yourself in bed, maybe cripple yourself, if you stay out here."

"I'd go out of my head if I didn't get out."

"Nonsense! You're not so all important that you can't lay up a week. The job would run without you for that long."

"Maybe it isn't important for the job that I'm out here, but I know that it is important for me," replied John. "Don't take it to heart, doctor. I appreciate what you've done, and I don't mean any disrespect to you by refusing to obey your orders. This thing is more important to me than you imagine. I've got to keep on my legs and see it through. Now, that's settled. Now, how's Nels?"

The doctor winced a little.

"He is safely on the road to recovery," he said, "minus his left leg from just above the ankle. Don't take it like that," he continued sternly as John groaned out a curse. "You are both very, very lucky to be alive

Digitized by Google

at all. Outside of your luck in getting to camp with Nels—which I don't understand any man's doing in that condition—luck was with you both in the way you were hit. If the arteries——"

"Please, doc', let the details go," interrupted John. "I'll take your word for it. But Nels' leg——"

"The ankle-joint was smashed to splinters—.44-caliber bullet smack through it."

"I suppose he can be fixed up with an artificial affair, can't he?" said John after a thoughtful pause. "Poor old Nels! Yes; we've got to try to fix him up; he'd die if he couldn't get out hunting. How is Uncle John?"

"Exactly as when you last saw him," said the doctor with a shrug of his shoulders. "He is living through Belle. It is lucky for Wolf John that she has plenty of life to give. Take her away and *poof*—out goes his lamp! She has Nels on her hands, too, now. We didn't tell Wolf John about this, naturally. Nels has told Belle all about how you saved him, and——"

"The old fool!" growled John. "Why couldn't he keep his mouth shut. Darn a man who has to go talking just because he happens to be on his back."

"And Belle told me to ask you when you would be down to the Point," concluded Dr. Dean.

John's face grew set. He looked away as he said:

"I'll be down to the Point when the King Pines are all saw-logs, and the drive is down behind the booms. Not until."

Dr. Dean whistled in surprise.

"Not till the drive is down, Mr. Peabody? That will be well into the Spring."

"Well into the Spring," agreed John.

"And you figure on staying in the bush until then?"

"Yes."

The doctor shook his head.

"I don't know your reasons, of course, Mr. Peabody, but by George, if I was a young man—well you wouldn't catch me wasting quite that much time away from Peabody Point. Not unless there was something down there that had me pretty well scared out."

"You've said it, doctor," said John with a hard laugh. "There's something down there that's got me pretty well scared out."

"What? You——"

"Yep. I'm afraid—just plain afraid—to go back to Peabody Point until I've got this job licked and bring it down the river with me."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE ICE GOES OUT

FOR the rest of the Winter and into the Spring, John continued to fight the job, without let-up or serious hindrance. For weeks he limped about on a crutch, while his wounded side healed and the half-paralyzed muscles came back to life.

It was weeks before he was himself again, weeks before the keen, healing air of the woods gave him back the store of energy which he had ravished so completely on that terrible dark, night when he fought his own weakness and the howling storm for Nels' life—and won.

The cruel North which had all but killed him, also had saved him. It had whipped him into the condition which made it possible for him to win through that night, and now as, haggard and halting, he stumped to and fro to watch his men, it stung his blood to quickened life and brought the color back to his cheeks and the spring to his step.

It was many weeks before he could put his strength to a piece of work, but not from the moment he got on his feet did he once relinquish his grip or let the pace of the camp slacken. He grew grim of face and hard of tongue during these weeks. The steady strain told on him, and, coupled to the experience of that night at the Falls, robbed him for the time being of much of his natural good humor.

He knew it himself; he could see it in the attitude of the men toward him, and he knew the remedy for it. But he had told the doctor the truth when explaining his reason for staying in camp. He was afraid to go back to Peabody Point before he had proved himself and made the job a success.

As Dugan had predicted, there was no more "bothering from Whisky Falls." The terrible lesson which the Peabody crew had dealt out so soberly had been stern enough even for the bad men of the Falls to take to heart. A few of them, men and women, drove tremblingly over to Spirit Lake to attempt in vain to explain to Bart how their plight was no fault of their own, but the

Digitized by Google

greater part of them weighed the probability of Bart's anger against the value of his protection and betook themselves away, changing their names and seeking places where Bart's rage was hardly likely to reach.

Whisky Falls was done for. So much of the fight had been won, and John and his crew were free to devote themselves entirely to their logging.

Word drifted over from Spirit Lake occasionally concerning Bart. At first it was to the effect that he was continuing his wild dissipation. Later, so the stories told, he had stopped drinking and had taken charge of one of the Lowrey camps in that section. Soon after that he sent out the word that all men were expecting:

"I'll settle with young Peabody when the drive is down. He may bring his job to the booms, but I'll see that he never spends his pay-check, unless he cashes it in ——. I'll run him out of the woods, or I'll put him out of business, and do it right on his own stamping-ground. Tell him that I'll settle with him when the drive is behind the booms."

They told John, and he nodded and said that something of the sort was to be expected, but there wasn't any need standing around, wasting any time because of it. The crew heard it and said about the same thing. It was not to be supposed that Bart would leave the woods where he had been the big man for so many years, and there was not room enough for him there if John stayed.

No one questioned Bart's courage or absolute confidence in himself. He had proven himself and had been victor in too many desperate affairs for that. As John had put the laugh on him, there could be but one end to the affair, and that was a clash between them when the drive was down and the grudges of the Winter came up for settlement.

THE word traveled about the woods, and Nels, on his bed in the doctor's house at Peabody Point, heard and was troubled. As soon as Dr. Dean would permit he arose and rode the tote-sleigh back to the camp. John swore and threatened him, but Nels sat him down quietly and waited for the storm to subside.

"The fight is not over yet, boy," he said when John ceased scolding. "What good would it do to bring the drive down if you couldn't win over Bart afterward? He'd be the winner then in spite of all you've done.

"You owe it to all of us to be ready, and that's my job—to see that you are ready. D'you think you're ready now? *Ptl* Bart could meet you face to face and pull and shoot before you knew what was happening. D'you think it would be fair to the boys who've stood by you to give him that advantage, and let him win out after all? No, boy, you've got to remember that that devil's a bear with long claws, and you've got to sharpen your claws yourself."

In the end he prevailed upon John to practise with the six-shooter in the few moments when the job did not claim his attention.

"Watch his hands if you meet him," Nels said over and over. "Remember, he's as good with one hand as the other, and quick as a cat. Don't pay any attention to his face—he's got a good poker face. Watch his hands, and the second you see his fingers curl toward his belt pull and tear loose from the hip. Hold low. Don't take your eyes above his belt. But first of all, watch his hands—watch 'em like a cat!"

JANUARY and February passed, and still the hard Winter weather continued. The ice-road lay frozen hard; in the woods the snow remained sufficient for easy skidding. The saws bit into the Pines with machine-like regularity, each day's work bringing the line of sawyers nearer the river, while the snow-covered ice of the Brulé disappeared under row after row of logs.

March came, and still the cold weather held on. As the job neared completion the strain upon John grew harder. The camp had become a prison to him; the woods were a mighty stockade which shut him out from all the rest of the world, doomed to a task which seemed to have no ending. The mood of the men corresponded to his.

Some of the younger men, undergoing their first Winter in the woods, gave way under the monotony and strain, drew their time and rushed for Spirit Lake, there to ease themselves of strain and money in mad dissipation.

The older men grew glum and silent. There was no more singing in the bunkhouse after supper. Most of the men

Digitized by Google

tumbled into their bunks immediately after the evening meal; those who sat up played poker and quarreled, laying up more grudges to be settled when the drive was down.

John now began to watch the sky each night before he went to bed.

"It'll thaw before morning," he told himself pessimistically each night; but it didn't.

The sleighing held up into the middle of March, when only a fringe of pines remained along the river, within skidding distance through the mud and slush. One afternoon a stream of sawyers began trickling into camp while the sun was yet high above the timber. They bore with them saws and axes, and they laughed and joked, as men suddenly released from a strain. Dugan, painfully engaged in composing a letter to his Hulda, ran out of the cook-shack in surprise.

"What's up with you bums?" he queried. "D'you get your time?"

For answer they swung him up from the ground laughingly. They tossed him from one to the other. They jigged, they sparred, they wrestled, they whistled and shouted to vent their feelings.

"Matter, you red-headed shrimp! Everything's the matter. We've hit the river, and this —— —— everlasting old job is done."

Then came another period of weary waiting, when the crew which was to take the drive down the river under Whitey Jack sat around with folded hands and waited for the ice to go out. John stayed with them. The strain had not lessened for him. There was still the task of seeing the drive downstream. It was a short drive and an easy one, it was true; but until it was safely accomplished he could not feel that his success was secure.

Came a morning at last when the bare, moist woods were redolent with awakening life. The sun warmed the men lazily as they emerged from the bunk-house. John, standing in the door of the office, smiled and stretched himself comfortably for the first time in weeks.

"Oh heigh! What a day!" he yawned.

The men were laughing as they went to breakfast. Down in the stables the horses were whinnying restlessly. And in the silence of morning there came from the river a sudden growling rumbling that held every man in camp instantly spellbound. A second rumble and every man let out a yell.

"She's going—she's going out! Hip, hip, hooray! Come on, river-hogs; she's agoing down stream!"

John reached the river bank first of all the crew that raced wildly for a sight of the welcome scene. In the middle of the river a ribbon of swift, black water split the melting, gray ice as far downstream as the eye could see. Along the banks the ice had relinquished its hold. The middle of the stream was filled with stray logs and behind them the great mass of the drive was starting slowly, grumbling loudly as if protesting against being disturbed, and crunching the shattered ice before it.

John stood silent as Whitey Jack and his men swarmed out upon the logs and, with peavies, cant-hooks and pike-poles, worried the brown mass free of tangles and steered it into the way it should go. There was no sense of elation in his breast. The drive was starting; the job was a success. He had proved himself; he had made good. But now, when the time had come for him to return to Peabody Point, he thought of Belle and trembled.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE WAY OF A LASS WITH A LAD

NOR did he join the men in their shouts when, on a bright Monday morning, they stood on the banks of the mill-pond at Peabody Point and looked back upon the millions of feet of timber of the drive lying snugly behind the big booms like ships riding in their slips. Neither did Wolf John's proud hand-clasp nor the look of admiration in the old man's eyes pay for the long, monotonous weeks that he had slaved in camp. Nor even Belle's warm hand-clasp of comradeship and her quiet:

"Oh, Cousin John! It's fine, fine! But I knew you would do it, I knew you would all the time."

No; that didn't help. For he scanned her eyes carefully and failed to see the look in them with which he had hoped and almost prayed that she would greet him.

And that was what he had fought and slaved for. That was why he had been afraid to go back to Peabody Point before he had won. That night on the snow-covered river when she had said so quietly, "I'm

Digitized by Google

not afraid of Bart; are you?" and that Sunday when, after visiting Gavin, she had said, "Bart would put the job through in spite of everything, and so can you—if you will only believe in yourself," had frightened him. For could a man hope to make a girl look at him with the look in her eyes that he hoped for unless he proved himself, until he believed in himself?

John came down from the house on the hill and went to the room that had been prepared for him in Dr. Dean's little white house near the dam. For the next two days he was busily engaged paying off the men and straightening out the tangled ends of the Winter's work.

Each evening he went up to the big house to dinner, and each time he scanned Belle's eyes in vain for the look which he craved more than the acclaim of men. Each time as he looked his spirits drooped a little lower. There was admiration, confidence, liking in her eyes. That was all; and John learned bitterly that these were nothing to a man who wanted love.

ON THE third evening he remained away. The desire to speak to Belle of what was in his heart had become a torture, and the torture increased while he was with her and without the courage to speak.

Late in the evening he sat on the bench beside the doctor's door and brooded over his cowardice. He was alone. Dr. Dean had gone far away to visit a patient. It was warm, so warm that the door was open, and the ticking of the doctor's clock was plainly audible outside. A full Spring moon silvered the world, and the passionate northern Spring, passionate because so short-lived, filled the night with a quickened pulse of life. And so he was sitting when Belle came running down the hill and demanded his reason for not coming up to dinner. He looked at her once and, trembling, looked away.

"Oh, nothing," he said fatuously. "I—just thought I'd stay with the doctor tonight."

There was a moment of silence.

"Uncle John sent me after you, Cousin John," she said softly. "He's having a bad evening and he wants you to talk to."

He rose and followed her without a word. He found his uncle rent with the Spring fret of an outdoor man condemned to inactivity. He talked and talked without paying any attention to what he said. His uncle's glee and pride in the manner in which one of his own blood had whipped Lowrey did not touch him.

He rose with a sigh of relief when at last Wolf John grew sleepy. With a curt good night he went out. He did not notice that Belle rose and came after him, and he was startled when she called to him from the porch as he started down the hill.

"What is the matter, Cousin John?" she asked sorrowfully. "Something has gone wrong. I can see it. You look unhappy. Won't you tell me about it?"

"Unhappy?" he said. "Why should I be unhappy?"

"That's what I've been wondering," she said, puzzled. "You've done big things. You've made yourself a big man here. And I'm proud. I was proud all the time you were doing it. Aren't you proud? Aren't you glad? Isn't it better than your old indifference? Why—you're a big man, you've had a brilliant success, and you don't look as if you were in the least bit thrilled over it."

"I'm not."

"Cousin John! How can you——"

"Because what I really want to win is so much greater to me—means so much more to me—is so much more necessary to my happiness—to my life—that the rest of it, all of it—everything means—nothing!"

She shrank back a little, as if instinct told her what was coming.

"Means—nothing?" she repeated.

"Nothing! Nothing at all—compared to what I really want to win."

"What you want to win? What's that?"

"It's you, Belle!"

She stood still, looking straight at him, her eyes widening slowly, as if at first she could not appreciate the significance of his words, as if the surprise were too great to be understood at once.

"Haven't you guessed it, Belle? Haven't you seen it? Why, you must have seen! What do you think I've stuck and worked in the woods for? Why do you think I've changed—and settled down and become something worth while? To please Uncle John? To make a career for myself in the logging business?

"No, I did it—I've done what I've done because that first afternoon, last Winter, when I met you on the swamp and you

Digitized by Google

showed me the way to Peabody Point I knew that I'd met the woman that I was going to love—the only woman in the world for me—and I wanted to have the right some day to ask you to be my wife. And I couldn't have that right until I'd shown that I was a man. Belle, Belle! Haven't you seen it? I—I haven't wanted to do anything in the world but make you care for me."

"Oh, John!" she moaned, and hid her face upon her hands and sobbed.

THE breath seemed to go out of John's body as he realized what her answer was going to be. It was as if his strength suddenly had been drawn from him. His head drooped, but he clenched his teeth and bit back the groan that welled up within him.

"I thought you had seen it, Belle," he said gently. "I thought you understood how I felt toward you. Don't cry; don't be unhappy—please."

She raised her head and looked at him, the tears still dimming her eyes.

"John — Cousin John — I thought — I thought you only liked me—that we were only chums. I never—never thought of anything else. Will you believe that, Cousin John? Will you—please?"

"I'll believe anything you want me to, Belle. Don't cry; don't be unhappy. It's all right."

"We were good friends. I thought that was how you looked at it, too. You were so fine—I never have had a real chum—boy or girl—until you came. It was so fine to have such a friend. I thought that was all you liked me for, too. I'm so ignorant, Cousin John; I don't know anything about such things. Bart wanted to marry me. He said he—he loved me. That gave me sort of a horror of it. I've never let myself think of anything like that since—Oh, John — Cousin John! Why can't we just be friends!"

"Don't—don't be unhappy."

She looked up sharply at the hopelessness in his voice.

"Cousin John! What—what are you going to do? You're not—going away?"

He looked away, not trusting himself to reply.

"You're not going to leave me—alone?"

"Belle! Isn't there any chance? Haven't you the slightest feeling for me? I'll wait—won't you say there's a chance of your—caring?"

She had dried her tears now and was looking at him calmly.

"We've always been honest with each other, John. I must be honest with you now. If there is any other feeling than friendship for you in my heart, I don't know it."

"Then it isn't there," he said. "You would know it if you cared." He took her hand. "I'm sorry I spoke, Belle. But you mustn't be unhappy over it. Promise me that you won't be—you can promise your chum that, can't you?"

"I'm losing—my chum," she said sadly. "It's all I deserve."

"It's my fault," protested John. "I should have seen that you didn't care for me—that way. Will you promise not to be unhappy?"

"No," she said. "Because I know that you are unhappy. I—I almost feel like lying and saying that I do care for you so that I want to marry you. But I am afraid that I—I can't!"

She saw the struggle he was undergoing and flung out her hands compassionately.

"Oh, John, how wrong I've been! How blind—how blind!"

John tried to speak. Yet he knew that there was nothing left to say. Each understood more than their words had told.

"We'll still be friends," he said, holding her hands. The hopelessness in his tone made the words a mockery. "Good night, Belle."

He tore himself away and plunged down the hill, while she stood staring after him with wondering eyes.

CHAPTER XXXVII

MAN TO MAN

JOHN went straight to his room at the doctor's. Without lighting the lamp or undressing he flung himself on the bed. Through the open window came the sound of a girl's laughter; somebody was rowing across the pond. The innocent sound struck John's ears like a twinge of torture. He leaped up and closed the window. When he lay down now the room was quiet, he was alone as he wished to be.

Well, he had failed after all. The structure which he had been building was nothing but a castle of dreams; and now there

Digitized by Google

was nothing left of it; it was gone, vanished —it had not even had a foundation! He had felt, foolishly, that there in the Big Woods, away from the caged and barbered civilization in which he had been a failure, he had found himself. That was where he belonged; he had been able to do things there, even to make men accept him as their leader. He knew why now.

It hadn't been because he fitted in there. Not because the stern, stimulating outdoors had brought out the best that was in him. It had been because Belle had been a prize to win that he had been capable of things far beyond his normal powers. Well, it was over now. A man had to take these things as best he could. Of course he would have to go away. He sprang up, the torture of his thoughts driving him into a fever which made the little room unendurable.

Outside, in the open space before the mill, the moonlight was unendurable. It reflected from the pond and made all things stand out little less revealed than in the light of day.

John pulled his hat down over his eyes and plunged away from the settlement into the timber. It was darker there, at least. There was no silly girl's laughter to trouble one's ears. He began to walk feverishly, caring not at all for trails, or for where he was going, merely seeking by motion to ease the anguish that was gnawing at his heart.

Daylight found him still walking, and the anguish was not in the least eased. He was calmer now, however, and he returned leisurely to the settlement. Sleep came at last when he again threw himself on his bed. He was awakened by a knock on the door and springing up saw that the sun was high and he had slept well into the forenoon.

"Come in," he said, and Nels entered the room.

"Hello, Nels," said John carelessly, then he caught a glimpse of Nels' serious expression and paused.

Nels shut the door, seated himself slowly, and sat with his hands folded between his knees, staring at the floor.

"Well, what is it?" asked John.

Nels looked up sideways, scratched his chin and loked again at the floor.

"Bart's in town," he said quietly.

"What?"

"Came in this morning," Nels nodded. "All alone. And he says he's going to stay as long as he pleases."

John had recovered from his surprise at the news.

"Well, what of it?" he said indifferently.

Nels' eyes came slowly from the floor to John's face.

"Will you give us the word to run him out of town?"

He was eying John in a way that the latter could not quite understand.

"Just give us the word," continued Nels. "There's half a dozen of us ready to put him out of business. If you want us to do it, we'll handle him, and you needn't have a thing to do with it—not till it's all over."

Then a glimmering of understanding came to John. He seated himself on the bed and spoke seriously.

"You say Bart came to town this morning?"

"Yes. Came alone." Nels shook his head. "There's the bones of a man in that devil. That's a pretty nervy thing to do—knowing there's half a dozen of us here aching to take the job off your hands."

"Off my hands, eh? Then—what's he after?"

"You," said Nels simply. Then he added, "He says he's come to run you out of the Woods for good."

A cold grin slowly distorted John's face. If Bart only knew how well such an affair appealed to him since last night! Here was one piece of luck, at least. Nothing to lose, no reason to worry about how the affair ended, and Bart, above all men, as the object for the fury against Fate that was raging within him.

"Where is he now?" asked John.

Nels looked him over, he noted the light of boy-recklessness in John's eyes, the absolute disregard for consequences in his bitter smile. Nels bit off a chew nervously.

"Boss, you know you don't have to mix in this at all. It's all darn nonsense, you being mixed up in a row with a devil like Bart, now. Yessir. You just give us leave —give me leave—it'll be over in ten minutes, and you won't be running a single chance—won't need to even know about it till it's over."

JOHN understood. Nels couldn't help making that speech. He meant it, too. He—or any one, or all of the men from camp—were perfectly willing to take the job off his hands. They gave

Digitized by Google

him that chance. It was their way. They were his loyal friends.

But John had learned too well the rule of life in the Woods not to comprehend the deeper feeling that lay beneath Nels' offer. Every man must keep himself, by such strength of arm and heart as has been given him, against Nature and against Men. And he who can not, he who must fall back on his friends, is labeled poor and unfit. Yes; the boys were perfectly willing—perhaps even anxious—to take the job off his hands, but they knew that the thing couldn't be done that way.

Bart had drawn his steel. He had played the part of a man, walking boldly and alone into the enemy's camp, knowing that the men, being what they were, would keep hands off. He had trusted them to play the part of men as it is played in the woods; it would be hard for them to do anything else.

"Where is he now?" repeated John.

He was looking into the little mirror on the wall, rubbing his chin. It was scandalous the way his beard grew out in a couple of days. As Nels talked, John drew forth shaving articles and began quietly to strop his razor.

"You know it's darn nonsense——" began Nels again.

John paused, half of his face lathered, and gave Nels a look that made him silent.

"We've had enough of that baby talk," said John. "Answer my question."

"He's down in the office now. He says he's going to wait there until you show up."

John finished shaving and looked at his watch. It was a quarter past nine.

"How does that compare with your time?" he asked. Nels' watch showed the same minute. "All right. You can go down and tell Bart that I'll leave this house and start walking toward the office at nine-thirty sharp. You tell him to leave the office and start this way at the same time."

Nels opened his mouth, but John's eyes made him remain silent. He rose and silently inspected the six-shooter that hung on a chair, throwing out the cartridges, examining them one by one, snapping the trigger six times rapidly, and carefully reloading. Then he went out without speaking or looking at John.

John dressed with great care. He put on a pair of new trousers and a new blue flannel shirt. He tied a bow tie carefully; it was a long while since he had tied one and it took some time. He looked in the mirror. His face, fresh from the shave, was boyish and ruddy. His apparel was neat and new. Satisfied, he turned away and took the revolver and thrust it into its accustomed place, inside the trousers-band on the left-hand side. It made a bulge in the new trousers, and he loosened his belt.

The watch showed that he had three minutes before the half hour. He sat down at the table to write a note to his father. With the pencil in his hand he gave it up, however. There was nothing to say; his father would get the news soon enough. He wished for Belle's sake that Bart hadn't picked Peabody Point as the place. Spirit Lake—any place far away—would have been better. Still, it didn't make any difference; nothing made any difference.

THE watch showed nine-thirty and he sprang up, opened the door, and stepped out into the bright sunlight outdoors. From the doctor's little house the river road ran straight and unobstructed to the office, plainly visible the distance of two city squares away.

John looked straight toward the office door as he stepped out; he was surprised at not seeing Bart. He started forward. A breeze came rippling over the mill-pond, bringing with it the odor of budding tamaracks and pines, of violets and moss, in the shaded forest beyond. The sunlight made his eyes blink.

It was a perfect Spring day. A fillip of breeze raised his hat. He set it more firmly on his head. Then he saw Bart.

Bart was standing idly on the office steps. Even at that distance John could see the sneer on his face. He noted that Bart, too, was cleanly shaven and carefully dressed. He went on slowly, doggedly keeping his eyes on the man before him.

Bart lounged idly forward to meet him. His hands were hanging at his side, as were John's. As they approached one another all things in this world seemed to cease to exist for John except those hands. Watch those hands—he can use either of them—watch those hands!

They were within easy range now. John did not see where he was placing his feet. There was wet sawdust in the street. He was not conscious that he slipped, he did

Digitized by Google

not hear the groan that went up from his friends as he slipped to one knee.

John only saw Bart's right hand. As it leaped upward toward the belt he drew and fired three times. He felt the wind of something fly past his temple. He could not understand why he was not hit. He stood upright.

Bart was thrashing around in the street, face down. John saw that Bart's gun was lying far away. Men were running toward him. Some walked slowly toward Bart. He looked stupidly at Nels.

"Didn't touch you, did he? All right, aren't you?"

John nodded.

"You were so quick, boy! You hit him before he had his gun up!"

They were carrying Bart away. John stared after them as they disappeared in the store with their burden. A bare-headed boy came out and started to run toward the doctor's. A man's voice checked him.

"No need bothering."

John felt thirsty and licked his lips.

"You're all right, ain't you, boy?" persisted Nels' voice. "Golly, you were quick! He had the start, but you got in the first shot!"

John turned with a look of inquiry toward Nels. His mouth was parched; he felt burning up inside, though outwardly he was cool.

"Is he—" He tried to speak calmly but his voice was hoarse and cracked. "Is he——"

Nels looked away. A man came out of the store where they had taken Bart.

"He hit him with all three shots!" he said loudly to a man across the street. "Bart never knew what hit him!"

A puppy came yipping happily down the street; the breeze swept in, sweet and odorous from the mill-pond.

"We'll take care of everything," Nels was saying. "You had to do it; he tried to pull first."

John turned away. The fog was clearing. He realized that he was still holding the revolver in his hand.

"Here—take this." He forced the weapon into Nels' hands. "I'm going for a walk. If anybody wants me I'll be up in the woods beyond the pond."

He was beginning to feel faint, but he steeled himself and walked steadily into the woods.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

WHAT THE PINES SAID

IT WAS over. He had won once more. The enemy who had sought to destroy him had been destroyed. He had not another enemy of that sort left in the world. He had played the man in the ultimate test. His slate was clean.

And now—what did it amount to? What had it brought him? It had not in the least helped him in the way he wished to be—and needed to be—helped. It had not made Belle care for him. He did not feel sorry for Bart. No, Bart was through. Nothing could trouble *him;* there were no aimless, bitter years ahead for him. Sorry for Bart! Why, he could almost envy——

"John! John! Oh, John, my boy! Is it true? Are you safe—are you unhurt?"

He sprang up. Was he dreaming? Was it a hallucination? Or was it really Belle who was running toward him?

"John!" She flung out her hands to him, but he backed away and made no effort to take them.

"Did they tell me the truth, John? Are you unhurt?"

"Yes. I'm all right," he said.

"Oh, thank God!"

Like a tender flower cut down at the root the tall, strong girl sank helplessly on the moss, her hands still outstretched to him.

John stood and stared down at her, a man turned to stone.

"Belle!" he whispered, awe-stricken. "Belle!"

He came closer. Her face was white against the dark moss.

"Belle!" he cried and, stooping, gathered her in his arms and bore her to the river.

He brought water in his hat and laved her brow, muttering her name over and over again. Her eyes opened dully. She saw his face above her. Her eyes brightened and her lips parted in a tiny smile.

"John—John dear," she said, "do you still want me?"

"Belle!" he murmured; and her arms reached up and enfolded his neck.

"You are unhurt, aren't you, John?" she whispered. "You are safe, aren't you?"

"Yes, yes; I'm all right." He lifted her to a sitting position. "You—you——"

"I ran after you; I had to," she said.

Digitized by Google

"Oh, John, John!" She buried her head against his shoulder. "John, I didn't know until now! I didn't know my own feelings! A boy came running up to the house and told me — told me about you and Bart.

"Then I knew—in a flash. It opened my eyes. I knew in an instant—when I heard that—that you were in danger—that you meant more to me than all the rest of the world—that if you were gone—oh, John, I didn't know before! But now I do. I—I've come to you—I had to!"

"You've come to me—" he stammered. "Belle—you mean—you mean——"

He held out his arms hungrily.

"Yes," she whispered as she leaned toward him, and in a moment John Peabody came into the joy that made all his success worth while.

Above them the breeze stirred the pines and Belle looked up.

"Hear that, John?" she whispered.

"Yes," he said. "What are they saying now?"

She snuggled closer to him as she whispered:

"That everything's all right—everything in this world—so long as we've got each other!"

THE END

The American Legion

SINCE the Legion grows rapidly and a magazine is always made up some time ahead, *Adventure* can not act as a news-bulletin for the Legion, but it can summarize the main accomplishments month by month.

The voting-power of the Legion (an incorporated body) lies in the Advisory Membership of three hundred, chosen from all over the country and its possessions, and from all parties and classes. The list is not yet complete, but already it includes the only two living ex-Presidents of the United States, William H. Taft and Theodore Roosevelt; ex-Secretary of State and ex-Secretary of War Elihu Root; ex-Attorney-General and ex-Secretary of the Navy Charles J. Bonaparte; ex-Postmaster-General and ex-Secretary of the Navy George von L. Meyer; ex-Secretary of War Jacob M. Dickinson; ex-Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson; ex-Secretary of War Luke E. Wright; ex-Secretary of the Navy Truman H. Newberry, and many other men nationally or locally known, whose standing is guarantee of the Legion's integrity.

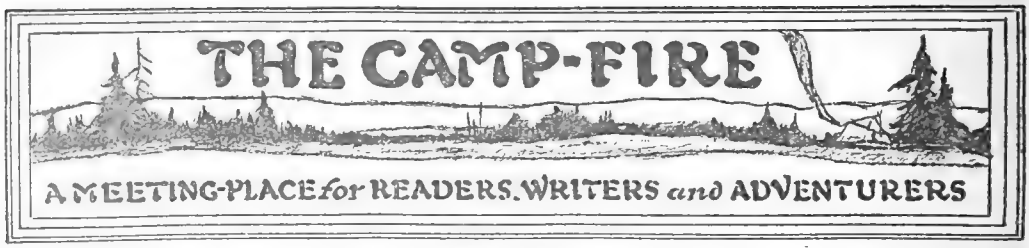
Several rather stupid charges have been made against the Legion. One is that of political affiliation or influence. There isn't any. The names of the three hundred voting members are sufficient proof. Nor is it easy to see how the Legion could be so used even if the attempt were made. The men enrolled are too widely scattered and of too many conflicting political beliefs. Also, any member can resign at any time simply by writing to the Secretary.

Another stupid idea is that the Legion is subversive of democracy in that it "forms an army" which should be done by no one except the Government. The Legion forms no army except in so far as a list of names may be considered an army. And the only way this list of names can become an army is by a call from the Government for volunteers. Those who join the Legion are pledged only to respond to such a call. No military arming, drill or assemblage is asked by the Legion. Any man can resign at any time. All the Legion does is to get hold of, *in advance*, all the men best fitted for instant war service, and to hold their names, addresses, and carefully-indexed qualifications ready for the use of the Government on the Government's request.

Military and naval experts strongly endorse the Legion's work as of tremendous practical value. And God knows it is as yet the only real step toward adequate national defense.

We of the Camp-Fire created the Legion, and it's particularly up to us to boom it along. Local organizers, recruiters and publicity-agents are needed. Do your share. There's no money in it. Just patriotism. And common sense. A. S. H.

Digitized by Google



WHAT with being editor of the *Canadian Fisherman* and going fishing himself, Frederick William Wallace has been too busy to write any Banks stories lately, but it's good to get a word from him anyhow:

Went to sea again in January. It was a desperate trip. Fifteen days at sea and not enough fish to pay for the grub we ate. Most of the time dodging gales and running into shelter harbors. Got caught offshore in a bad blizzard on January 13th. Hove-to for 48 hours—5 hours under bare poles in the wildest sea and wind I ever saw or felt in all my seafaring. Some scientists claim that no seas are over thirty feet from trough to crest. I wish they were out with us in 55 fathoms on the edge of the Bank, with the wind N. E. and blowing at 90 miles an hour. Some of the combers seemed as high as our mastheads, 90 feet above the deck. I did not stop to measure them, but I'm sure they were running 50 feet high. Hope to send you some snapshots I took soon.

HERE is a bit out of a letter written from France. Probably most of us have had the same idea borne in upon us:

There are a number of hospitals here, and each day you can see the wounded being brought in. Some of them are most terribly mangled, yet they seem all so cheerful and plucky. It is really amazing what sufferings they endure. Modern war is such a damnable kind of affair. There is so much cold-blooded brutality about it: killing on such a wholesale scale.

HERE is a letter on elephants and wild animals in general that will probably give rise to some discussion. It came in reply to my query at a previous Camp-Fire as to the persistent rumor that, though never yet found by man, there were somewhere "elephant graveyards" — hidden places where the great beasts go to die and, incidentally, to leave a rich deposit of ivory.

You mentioned the fact that the skeleton of an elephant which had died a natural death had never been found. I have always believed that the reason for this was because elephants *never* died a natural death. No wild animal does. When age begins to creep upon them, they lose their keen senses of hearing, smell and sight, and succumb to their natural enemies. With elephants, their greatest enemy is man, and what is more natural than that man should kill all those whose powers of perception are not keen enough to help them to escape? Another thing which makes me think that this is true, is the fact that elephants are a remarkably long-lived species of animal. The remains of mastodons which have been discovered have all been found in the ice or in some bog. There is nothing to show that any have ever died of old age.

Now I do not declare absolutely that no elephants ever die from natural causes. This theory of mine is the result of the observation of the habits and lives of animals. "My lord the Elephant" is outside the pale of my observations, and I am open to conviction, but I have never known any wild animal to die from natural causes.—W. T. WHITE.

DOUBTLESS many of you already know of the death of Colonel C. ap Rhys Pryce on a European battlefield. Here is the letter that brought the news to me—from Paul C. Hurst of California, who, needless to say, is "one of us."

I have just received news of the death of Colonel C. ap Rhys Pryce in Europe, and knowing that he has many friends among *Adventure* readers, I hasten to acquaint you with the facts.

When the war broke out Pryce hastened to join his colors. He was given a commission in the Princess Patricia Regiment, and was among the first of the Canadians to sail toward the European battlefield.

The dispatch received here, which was immediately verified by wire, read: "Eighty Canadian casualties from the first Dominion troops have been reported. Three officers of the Princess Patricia Regiment have been killed—Captains Newton, Fitzgerald and Pryce."

Pryce has served under several different flags—the latest, up to the time of the European war, being one of his own, when he led an army of Rebels into Mexico. He needs no introduction among your readers, and my power of manipulating a typewriter would be insufficient of praise to do him half justice.

If you have the present address of Townend I would consider it a great favor if you would pass this information along to him, with my very best regards. Townend will recall the story of yours truly making a trench-digging record with my bare hands under a cannon trying to dodge stray bullets that were being fired at the Colonel by a bunch of moving-picture insurrectos—I don't know whether they were thinking of revenge or the considerable

Digitized by Google

sum of Mexican money awaiting the man who got Pryce. I crawled out of the squirrel hole that I had enlarged to man-size, and very excitedly asked the Colonel if he was hit, and he slowly smoothed out his mustache and said, "No; rotten bad shots, those blighters."

Here's to the Colonel!

HUGH PENDEXTER is pretty well known to most of you through his stories in this and other magazines, especially his "Tiberius Smith," and the half-dozen volumes of his Camp and Trail Series. I had known him some time by letter, but never met him till two years ago, when Talbot Mundy and I were in camp in Maine. It was Mr. Mundy's first glimpse of Maine, and he was so strong for it that he was already laying plans for a permanent home there, and wanted more extensive data than I could give him.

I knew Mr. Pendexter was familiar with Maine, back, sides and across, and wrote him for information. He didn't send it. He brought it. He was spending the Summer down on the coast, and, while we'd said how glad we'd be to see him, we'd hardly dared hope he would make the long trip. But he did. Came at dusk, brown, quiet, a woodsman for all his "city clothes." That night we three sat around the fire and he told us much we did not know. When we turned in he rolled up in some extra blankets and the night separated us again. Early in the morning he was on his way back to the coast. I have never seen him since.

BUT I've learned a lot about him from others, enough to know that the trivial incident I have set forth is typical of the man and his quiet readiness to serve his friends. And the advice and information he gave us that night have proved entirely sound and sure. I bring it up at our Camp-Fire merely because we all like to know the men back of our stories.

A WORD on "Snapshotting War" in our last issue. "Photo by James H. Hare"—for fourteen years those words have been appearing in inconspicuous type on published photographs of the world's dramatic happenings—wars, disasters, stirring events of all kinds. But everybody calls him Jimmy Hare. Not from any lack of respect, for despite his small stature he is probably the biggest man in his line—even bigger than his line, in fact. Also, he is a *man*. But he's also a little boy—with the dry humor and resource that come only with the years, and a kindly impudence and everlasting humanness that the years too often take away. Even a Japanese field-marshal couldn't stand the strain and took to calling him "Jimmy."

Cuba, Manchuria, Venezuela, Haiti, Mexico—and now Europe. Wherever war is, Jimmy is. And if any one thinks Jimmy doesn't get as close to the firing-line as Jimmy can—which is generally closer than any other non-combatant can—it is a mistake. Once, caught in a field being ripped up under his feet by Russian shells, he did get his mind off his business long enough to consider personal affairs. So he pulled out his little note-book and made the brief entry: "Jimmy has gone too far this time."

But he hadn't, and the thousands who know him hope that he never will.

YES, we're still working on the mystery surrounding the real fate of General Sir Hector Macdonald, the English general who rose from the ranks, gained honor in the Boer War, was disgraced in Ceylon, reported a suicide in Paris (March 25, 1903), and buried in Scotland, but persistently rumored to be still alive—in China, Japan, Russia, Bulgaria, South America or elsewhere.

The other day I had a long talk with an American who was on a Paris newspaper at the time of Macdonald's alleged suicide. He merely hooted at the idea that the death could have been a "plant." Said it was impossible under the circumstances.

On the other hand, another person has just affirmed that there is no record of Macdonald's death registered in the files of the British War Office, and that he left a widow, so that, if for pension purposes only, some definite record on this point would seem necessary. This is far from conclusive evidence even for establishing a doubt, since a record of death may not be customary in cases like this. But it would seem well worth careful investigation.

IN THE letters that, since our last report, have come in from pretty well all over the world there are some new and interesting clues. Also another phase of the matter is emphasized—that Macdonald was innocent of the charges brought against him in Ceylon. I'm sure that all of us hope he was innocent, and that, dead

Digitized by Google

or alive, the good name of this great soldier can be cleared of all smirch. It gives us a new incentive to pursue our investigation. If we can help right a wrong as well as solve a mystery, our work is more than doubly valuable. Come forward, any of you who can add to the information so far gathered.

First, here is a letter from our old friend D. Wiggins:

I have fortunately stumbled on something that seems to be another link in the Hector Macdonald mystery. In talking with a Boer War veteran the other day he mentioned some words he had overheard when acting as headquarters orderly for Macdonald. Then I asked him, "Was that the man who killed himself?" And he replied with a grin, "Killed himself like——!"

Now, he told me that a man of his acquaintance had seen Hector Macdonald in the China service, drilling recruits, and, although neither had called any names, that the missing officer had admitted his identity. Now this, mind you, was the year after his supposed death. And the man who gave me the information never saw a copy of *Adventure* till I gave him one a couple of weeks ago, and did not know there was any hunt for Macdonald on at all.

HE TOLD me that Macdonald was a "ranker," which made certain other officers dislike him. So they, seeing that he was bound for the top of the ladder, started charges against him. Hired servants to swear to the most outrageous statements, and did everything in their power to have him discredited. They succeeded.

Now, here is another thing: ——— told me what I never read in the columns of *Adventure* in regard to the identification of Macdonald's supposed corpse —that the Chief of Police of Glasgow was the only outsider permitted to view the remains, and he had not seen Macdonald for over twenty years. And a man changes a whole lot in that time. My friend says he thinks there was a body in the casket all right, but that it was a corpse from the morgue, or possibly Monte Carlo. That is entirely possible.

NEXT comes a letter from Will S. Hofford. Shortly after writing it Mr. Hofford stopped in to see me on his way from Oregon to England to enlist for the war. I heard from him once or twice from Scotland, but by this time he is probably at the front or—well, any of the things that might happen to those who go to the front.

I am an Edinburgh man and so much interested in your search after General Macdonald. Mac was poor as a church mouse. He was presented with a jeweled sword of honor by the City of Glasgow while he was almost "broke," and I believe he commented somewhat bitterly on this presentation, although I have forgotten what he was reported to have said. Then there was a popular impression at home that that scandal in Ceylon, in which Mac was implicated, was all a frame-up to railroad him from the Army. I did not put much stock in these rumors at the time, but later thinking and also the reading of your remarks incline me to think that there is no doubt but that there was a more or less substantial foundation for them.

HERE are two remarkably interesting letters from Omaha, the second being in answer to my request for further data:

To settle the matter of Hector Macdonald, formerly Major-General, etc., British Army. When the charges, trumpery and false, though on their surface clear and plain, were pressed, Macdonald determined to retire from it all, and in the Autumn of 1912 he was a member of a closed community in the Hills at the borderland beyond Nepaul. Here, under their guidance, he found the peace that never was given him by the noble (?) gentlemen who served her Majesty under and about him.—DR. JAMES K. NEWMAN.

Have waited until now for some definite, exact information before replying to yours of the 28th ult., regarding Hector Macdonald. He was still living on the 13th inst., just across the line of Nepaul, with a community, on the plateau, entrance to which is at the gorge about 83° 10' east long. and 29° 13' north lat. McTavish is dead. His case was the old one of the difference between nobles and plebeians. Despite the fact of his genius and indomitable will, forcing him to rank and power, he never had the good-will of his subalterns. Every twist and turn was used against him, and the Ceylon affair, which caused a breach between him and the lady whom he was to honor by marriage, caused him to seek for a refuge from this turmoil and thus his public life ended. His private life commenced as a *Chela* in the community, and he has found quietude and peace.

He has not appeared in the world since his entrance But one member of this community has gone back to the world since 1800 and he subscribes himself—JAMES K. NEWMAN, M. D.

NOW a letter from Hawaii in reply to mine asking for data additional to a hint the writer had previously given me:

Can't give you more Hector Macdonald stuff while I am here in this Territory—several loose ends to be gathered up, and one can't do that sitting still. I'm more interested in Sir Hector than you folks are. I know he was alive over a year after his reported death—but it'll take a long, long and expensive search to get all the facts, and then it'll take a keen analyst and a Talbot Mundy to put 2 and 2 together rightly.

ANOTHER word from Captain McPherson, who has already told us his belief, shared by others, that Macdonald for a while was carving a new name for himself in South America:

Yours of 9th inst. received and contents noted. I beg to state that owing to lack of mail from New Zealand I can not give you any news, only that the General was in a South American Republic resting up, and no telling where he next will turn up. His faithful body-guard is still with him. And I do

Digitized by Google

know for a fact that he has been offered a good position in Turkey and he may take it. This I got from my uncle, who is a Pasha retired. Also a cashiered officer of the British Army. When I come to New York I will show you letters and things that will prove to you that Hector is a second Dreyfus, and that the British Government made a too hasty mistake. Also, it was prompted by society, because Hector came up from the ranks. It will probably be twelve months or more before I get to New York. —JAMES L. MCPHERSON.

I HAVE a letter from a man I've known several years, though by correspondence only, saying he had been a prisoner of Macdonald's during the Boer War and had afterward met him on the road to Tibet, in command of the bunch of "foreign devils" whom the Chinese call the Lost Legion. But this letter, like others I hold, I am asked not to publish.

Solving the Macdonald mystery is not only interesting work but, so long as there is any doubt as to his death and any possibility of establishing his innocence, our investigations take on something of the nature of a duty. Help if you can.

ONCE before Charles Edward Daniell gave us a story of Florida, and a woman reader wrote in that "the Seminoles were declared extinct on the records of the War Department." Mr. Daniell wrote me in reply:

It may be so . . . . . Miss ———'s knowledge of the Seminoles through her residence at Mellonville is naturally interesting. But what knowledge of them—or of Southern Florida—I have, was gained when there were no Mellonvilles, and Miami was little more than a name. The Indians in the stories I have so far written I knew personally, and though the stories are largely fiction there are underlying facts in them all. But of the remaining remnant of Indian tribes we have left, there is no question but that the Seminole is the only Indian of romance left to us—the manliest and most self-respecting. He may drink at times—all Indians do—but when he does, it's in company with many others, and a monitor is appointed to guard the fallen. Then, too, they have never tolerated immorality. A pretty good Indian.

As to his story in this issue, Mr. Daniell writes:

This story I can say is really built from three incidents which came under my personal observation, and although as a whole it is purely fiction, it embraces a number of facts. "State o' Maine" is a real character, and the kingfisher's cry, I don't doubt, is still used in the 'glades today, as formerly; also the caw of the crow and the cry of the screech-owl as notes of warning. There is a world of tangible romance in every square mile of this mysterious territory. During the War of the Rebellion it was filled with deserters and refugees, and there has never been a time up to 1910 when it has lacked fugitives from justice, criminals, or honest smugglers. And yet these people are never seen on the coast. All their trading is effected through the Indians, and you might live at Miami or Tampa for twenty-five years and never see one. But penetrate the 'glades twenty-five miles, and as you advance bird-calls will precede you, and you will run across deserted camps that are far from being as deserted as they appear. And so I will say that so far as the atmosphere is concerned, this story is true to life.

LETTER FRIENDS

Note—This is a service for those of our readers who want some one to write to. For adventurers afield who want a stay-at-home "letter-bunkie," and for stay-at-homes, whether ex-adventurers or not, who wish to get into friendly touch with some one who is out "doing things." We publish names and addresses—the rest is up to you, and of course we assume no responsibility of any kind. Women not admitted.

Here are some men to start with, most of them men who have themselves adventured but are now tied down by illness or accident. You who are still out among the branching highways of the world, why not drop them a line? And you, too, who once wandered free or have only dreamed of it.

(1) George H. Hicks, 3 Mt. Pleasant St., St. Johnsbury, Vt.

(2) A. I. Macdonald, 70 Church St., Springfield, Mass.

(3) J. G. Leroy, Y. M. C. A., Brandon, Man.

(4) E. Windle, Avalon, S. C. I., Calif.

(5) Henry C. Winters, No. 2379. 2nd Remounts, British Expeditionary Force, care of G. P. O., Le Havre, France. (An Australian.)

(6) Lesly Schmidt, 205 N. 6th St., Great Falls, Montana.

(7) Hermann Zabel, Co. F, 2nd Battalion Engineers, Presidio, San Francisco.

(8) Frank A. Hamberry, 1322 N. 22nd St., Philadelphia.

(9) Jack Fitzwallace, Y. M. C. A., Portland, Oregon.

W. TOWNEND, as you know, went back to England to enlist for the war, but, as once before, his somewhat imperfect eyesight caused his rejection. At this writing he is recently back from France, bringing home with him a badly wounded relative. Naturally he saw more or less of what is going on at or near the seat of war. Here's a bit from one of his letters to me:

Every night while we were there wounded would arrive from the field hospitals. They are wonderfully plucky. They never grumble or complain or give any trouble. All they ask for is cigarettes, and they can bear anything. Some of the wounds are almost too frightful. How they can live at all beats

Digitized by Google

me. I don't know but I am beginning to realize what war is. The strain on the men in the trenches is fearful. When they come out they are good for nothing. They try to keep them there (in the trenches) as long as they can stick it, and then give them a long-enough rest to make them fit again without making them restless. They say that most of the wounded dream of the trenches. Few of them will talk of what they have been through. Even my brother-in-law will only say a few words now and again of what he saw. And yet up at the firing-line they are all frightfully cheerful. It is only when they get away for a while that they seem to realize how horrible it is.

And another bit farther on. (He says they're not worrying, but other parts of his letter show that he himself is worrying a good deal because he can't get to the front to do his share.)

We are not worrying over here. Recruits are still rolling in, and I think that people realize that every man is needed. No one knows when the new armies are going. Indeed, the first may have already reached France. Nothing is ever said, no warning given, no good-bys permitted. Word comes in the middle of the night sometimes, and a regiment is marched off before dawn. A man at the War Office told me the other day that when the first 70,000 men were sent off nothing was known of their departure in the War Office itself except in the departments which actually had to do with despatching the troops overseas.

A later letter from Mr. Townend announces that he has succeeded in enlisting in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

INFORMATION DIRECTORY

IMPORTANT: Only items like those below can be printed—standing sources of information. No room on this page to ask or answer specific questions. Recommend no source of information you are not *sure of*. False information may cause serious loss, even loss of life. *Adventure* does its best to make this directory reliable, but assumes no responsibility therefor.

For data on the Amazon country write Algot Lange, care Explorers' Club, 345 Amsterdam Ave., New York City. Replies only if stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed and only at Mr. Lange's discretion, this service being purely voluntary.

For the Banks fisheries, Frederick William Wallace, editor *Canadian Fisherman*, 35 St. Alexander St., Montreal. Same conditions as above.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii and Alaska, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Ag., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal North West Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

For Adventurers' Club, get data from this magazine.

For the American Legion, The Secretary, The American Legion, 10 Bridge St., New York.

Mail Address and Forwarding.—This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

THERE follows a letter I think you'll find good reading. Considering the rapidity of Mexican events it might now be called an historic document—in a way. In any case it is amusing. Incidentally, if it meets the eye of the man who wrote it, and from whom and of whom I've heard nothing for a long time, I hope he'll drop me a line.

Your memory may be strong enough to recall the writer—or it may not—as being one of the cock-sure guys who informed you that the Madero Government would not last two months from the date of his writing. Well, it didn't, and here's the sequel:

In a letter I wrote you from ———, I told you of the burning of my hospital and of the fighting that had taken place just prior thereto. Well, that was just a forerunner of deep, dark trouble and the large financial loss of the American company for whom I worked, for shortly thereafter we were stood up in front of a firing-squad of this Aquamado person, and a little later in front of the guns of a certain Contraras, but the big thing came off when El Indio, Mariano, came to town, for as a matter of variation he stood us in front of his machine-guns. As a matter of fact I got so I could tell the caliber of a rifle every time it was poked in my belly.

THEN came the unfortunate accident that occurred to Don Poncho Madero and all Mexico seemed stunned for a time. Then the loyal Madero troops revolted—and Colonel X—— of the —— regiment came over and trimmed us up again. But the *Coronel* had lived with us and had a large understanding of where things were, and when he got through gathering in his toll I had one linen suit and no shoes. After everything was trimmed up to the satisfaction of every one, the Colonel dropped large hunks of dynamite down the shafts of the mines and thus assured himself that there would be nothing left for the Federals should any of them come in looking for voluntary loans "*para patria*."

Well, we had a long consultation in the "Cantina of the Flower of One Day" that night, and we resolved that, as there was no method in prolonging our stay on the property, as we were not earning our salaries—also as we had had the fear put in us and the roads were cut, we decided to make it to some point in civilization the best way we could. I took the hospital car—a broad-gage, two-cylinder railroad-automobile—and loaded the women on it and started for ——— and got within a few miles of the town when the car was taken away from me. I sent the women on into the city and went with the rebels—this was on the 11th of March — to ———, a German smelter that was in the hands of the rebels.

I WAS half prisoner and half military surgeon for two weeks, when they told me I could get back to ——— and from there I could get a train to Mexico City, thence over to Vera Cruz and come by boat to the United States. In view of the fact that I had less than twenty Mexican dollars, I thought their information was somewhat out of place. I thanked them, however, and beat it for the north on a bum old horse one of the lineal

Digitized by Google

descendants of the Forty Thieves had given me.

I arrived at Jiminez, in the State of Chihuahua, some three days later, and found a Gringo, a Mr. A. J. Warren, there. He was the owner of the light plant, and in so far as externals went he said that the people of the town didn't know that there was a revolution. There was a Federal garrison in the town, and the military band furnished the music for the plaza twice a week. "Get out of Mexico?" he said. "Far be it. Come up to the plaza with me tonight and listen to the music—or perhaps take a turn around the square and hear some star-eyed *señorita* say, '*Adios, caballero,*' and you'll never want to leave this joint, for it's a good 'un."

I went up-town with him that night and later did a little courting through a barred window, and the town did look good. There was but one other doctor in this town of 12,000, so I interviewed a druggist the next morning and by noon had a real doctor-shop in "La Botica Mexicana." The office was a little shy as to fixtures, but it served and I gathered in the 'dobe dollars to my heart's content.

ONE morning early Warren came into my room at the Chink's hotel and informed me that there was fighting in the center of the town and that the rebels had attacked in force. It was very early and I need the beauty-sleep, so I spoke harshly to him. He replied spiritedly and left me alone. I could hear the firing—volley-firing—and the occasional drone of a machine-gun. I tried to go back to sleep, but the opposition was too great. I rang my bell for breakfast, but it went unanswered, for the Chinos had lit out. I dressed, went into the dining-room and found a grapefruit and some ripe figs, which I ate, then started out to apologize to Warren. I found him on the roof watching the fight.

We watched the maneuvers for an hour or so and succeeded in drawing the rebel fire, so we went down. The marksman had the range of the ladder we came down on, but he fortunately did not hit us with the fifteen or twenty shots he fogged away at us with. After this there was nothing to do except sit around in the *patio*, smoke, and drink up the Chino's beer while we waited for the firing to cease. The battle lasted for two days, when the Federals evacuated the town—and the rebels sacked it.

ON THE afternoon after the capitulation, Warren and I went up-town—he to look after the state of his wires, and I just went along. We got as far as the drug-store when we met five officers, all drunk, who asked if I was the *Gringo medico*. Warren told them that I was, whereupon one of them went into a lengthy explanation of where their wounded were and wound up by saying that he wanted me to go and see them—that the road was clear and the negotiation was without peril, in fact all he wanted was for me to go out once, make such dressings as were needed and come back to town. He would, in fact, give us passes and safe-conducts out and back and that would end it, for Colonel X—— had taken the town and the said X—— was very much of a military man.

I knew X———.he's a *peon* who can not read—so I told Warren to tell the officer that I spoke no Spanish and for them to go and get the native medico, whereupon the officer (he was a major) remarked:

"Tu hablas español, verdad? Bueno, entonces montate en el coche, cabron, y viaense con el medico y hace interpretaciones para el. Los revolucionarios son gentes particulare y atencion es muy necesaria."

Which being interpreted meant that Warren went with me—not at the point of the rifle—not exactly—and was my official mouthpiece for ten days. At least, I made him do the talking for the first day, but after that he refused me flatly and I had to fall back on my own knowledge of the language, which was greater than his anyway.

WELL, we talked American consuls and threatened intervention and other dire calamities in the case of our not being released, but X—— was a sandal-foot and flushed with victory, therefore he forgot about the safe conduct and his word as a soldier and a *peon*, so we ran the military hospital until a certain Sam Drebin, a Jewish soldier of fortune, came straying into the hospital with a bullet through his lung. I had had a letter from Consul Ham of Durango, wherein he stated that he (Ham) had received notice from Drebin's mother that she had heard of his death—and would I see that he got a decent burial at the expense of the State Department. I showed the letter to Drebin and he had us released so we could send a letter back to the consul explaining that Drebin was still working the Colt's rapid-fire—or would be as soon as he got out of the hospital, and for the consul to go to the devil with Drebin's compliments.

That night, in view of the fact that we were leaving early next morning, Colonel X—— who had just promoted himself to a general's position—decided he would sleep in the room of the house Warren and I were occupying. I forgot to state that we were at a Gringo ranch called Corrales and that it was managed by a certain Don Guillermo—a pale-eyed, mild-mannered Texan, who had an assistant of the same stripe, named Wilson. Well, Don Guillermo heard the altercation between Sr. Dn. G'ral. X ——— and myself about who should have the room, and the Dn. Guillermo butted into the argument in time to have a large .44 Colt's taken out of the stomach of the sacred person of the General, for the conversation had waxed warm.

The *gerente* of the ranch explained very patiently to the General that he had not been invited into the house, also that the two Gringoes were his guests, and until such time as the Americans saw fit to leave and give the General a room in the house he could go and sleep with the rest of the animals in the corral. Then he took my cannon away from me and went to bed.

BUENO. The General's feelings were hurt and the next morning he had Don Guillermo arrested and haled before the awful presence. The Don haled all right and took Wilson along as the official interpreter. The General thought a fine of about 25 'dobe dollars would just about heal his lacerated feelings, whereupon the Don told him that all the money that belonged to the ranch was buried and he had lost the key.

Bueno; in the absence of the money it would be the General's painful duty to take the Don out for a little walk over the hot, sandy desert, and have his cavalry escort him about twenty-five dollars' worth from the ranch, when he would be permitted to return, without water, to his house again. Much as it pained the General to do this, he wanted to

Digitized by Google

assure the Don that he was doing it solely for the good of the country—and to refresh the Don's memory as to where the paltry money of the ranch was concealed. These were troublous times, and the patriots were in sore straits and needed the money, so, in case the Don's memory was now better, he would compound the felony and let the ranch manager off for 15 pesos, but, at the reduction, that would have to be cash in the hand. While the General had the strongest personal regard for the Don, he, at the same time, was deeply in love with the sacred cause for which he was fighting, and it seemed to him that 15 dollars was cheap enough for insulting the general of a brigade. Also the day would be very hot.

Well, the Don still had a bad memory and the Señor Wilson was asked what he knew about the funds of the ranch. The Señor Wilson said that he knew less than the Don Guillermo and he himself was only sure of one thing and that was that while he wanted to assure the General X—— of his highest personal regard and to reaffirm his loyalty to all things Mexican, and was from the heart out a Mexican and could concur in everything from the assassination of Hidalgo to the killing of Madero, yet he revered them all as martyrs. Man was not at his best in a patriotic cause until he had been martyred, anyway, and he only hoped that it would not be his painful duty to add another to Mexico's already too long list of slain for the country, but the Don was too old to make long trips alone and it would reflect on Mr. Wilson and the Americans here assembled if they permitted the Don to go out in the terrible sun without protest.

MR. WILSON further stated, much as he regretted to bring such an unpleasant matter to the General's notice, that when a certain American by the name of Scott marched through the country on to the capital of this beautiful republic, he left strong garrisons along the route, and at the city of Chihuahua he left his strongest garrison, for Chihuahua boasted 45,000 inhabitants and the American General was compelled to leave seven men to preserve the peace, also there were—count 'em—four—count 'em—Americans at the ranch, which was more than half of General Scott's garrison, while there were considerably less than one-fifth of the population represented by the soldiers of the General now at the ranch.

This seemed a powerful argument and in view of the fact that Wilson had my gun strapped on him and General X—— knew it to be a .44 loaded with smokeless powder and soft-nosed, steel-jacketed shells, he smiled amiably and let the matter of the 50-kilometer walk go by default. He indicated, however, that it was his wish that the doctor remain with the column a few days longer, as he was not satisfied with the condition of some of the wounded. Whereupon the doctor, taking his gun from Mr. Wilson, remarked:

"Thy absence will taste bitter in our mouth, General, yet we feel it our duty to cease molesting thee, and, with thy permission, myself and my companion will take our reluctant departure."

Well, that stuck, too, so we left—but this letter drags itself to a terrible length, so suffice it to state that the General had given us passes with which we could only go West, so we wound up at the camp of the Inde Gold Mining Co., and found that concern ready to ship out $300,000 in gold bullion, with no one to take it out, so we loaded the plunder on an ore-wagon and brought it back to Jiminez and then to Chihuahua, where we turned it over to the A. S. E R. smelter there and then came on to the States.

WE HAD a brush or two with the rebels coming in, but the only incident worthy of record was at the custom-house on the Mexican frontier where they searched our baggage for arms. I had my cannon under my shirt and it evidently made a bulge, for the saddle-colored inspector asked me what was under my coat, to which question Warren languidly remarked:

"That is what the natives call *'el cañon del doctor'* and it's a .44 loaded with smokeless powder and soft-nosed bullets."

The inspector demanded the gun and again Warren talked for me—making up for his neglect at Corrales, I guess.

"The gun," he said, "goes off every time the doctor pulls it out of the holster, so if you want it you'd better take it yourself, because we are too near the line to have any one walk through a lot of smoke over an old Colt's gun. I'd give you mine, but it has the same habit. *Adios, amigo*, and may God go with you and protect you against fool Americans coming out of Mexico, for they are all nervous."

So we went over the bridge and into the U. S.

IF YOU know of any real thing that's going to go on any place in Latin America, please let me know. I do not feel that I can throw in with our friends across the Rio Grande, for that's Indian warfare, pure and simple, where they fire on white flags, use soft-nosed bullets and, on occasion, torture captives, and it is not good dope for a civilized man to throw in with them. They have a few foreigners in both armies—machine-gun men, artillerists and one cavalryman — Mondragon, the Frenchman—but they all build barricades for their backs when they go into action.

OUR identification cards remain free to any reader. The two names and addresses and a stamped envelope bring you one.

The cards bear this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Later, arrangements may perhaps be made for money deposits to cover cable or telegraph notifications. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. Send no applications without the two names and two addresses in full.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later, for the cost of manufacture, we may furnish, instead of the above cards, a card or tag, proof against heat, water and general wear and tear, for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give the two names and addresses in full when applying.*

Digitized by Google

I SUPPOSE I've had fifty letters explaining the cartridges used in the Sepoy Rebellion. I ought to have known without asking, and what makes me feel particularly imbecile is that somewhere back in my mind I did know, but went ahead and asked instead of stopping to think. Anyhow it's an interesting point, and here is one of the letters that supplies the answer briefly and comprehensively:

I note in the February Camp-Fire an inquiry elicited by one of Talbot Mundy's stories as to the possible use of breech-loading weapons at the time of the Indian Mutiny. As the writer suggests, one of the causes of this mutiny was the objection to biting "cartridges" greased with hog fat by the natives, who believed the hog to be unclean and the touching of his flesh to insure a loss of caste.

Such cartridges did not imply a use of breech-loaders. They were simply cartons of tightly rolled paper containing the proper powder charge and coated with grease as a lubricant and to make them waterproof.

They were used in muzzle-loaders, the user tearing off a flap at the rear with their teeth in order to expose the powder to the flash from the percussion-cap; it was then rammed home, the bullet being rammed down on top. There was, of course, an appreciable gain in speed, inasmuch as it was unnecessary to measure each powder charge at the time of loading.—A. E. SWOYER.

A JANUARY letter from a Camp-Fire man in the Canadian contingent:

We are expecting to be sent away at any time and although we do not know our immediate destination we expect to reach the front where the big things are happening before Spring. We have a very interesting bunch here; men who have soldiered in all parts of the globe, men just from the trouble in Mexico, men who saw fighting in S. Africa, one who went up to Pekin with the Allies, and lots of old-timers from the Islands. One hears stories every day which would make good reading for *Adventure* and one can find several copies of the current number kicking around the barracks at any time. We will all of us, no doubt, be eligible to the Adventurers' Club by the time we get back and will be able to tell some tall stories around the "Camp-Fire."

Fred L. Bunn,
Wolesley Barracks, London, Ont., Canada.

DON'T forget that the American Legion is particularly *our* Legion, since it was one of the Camp-Fire who started it. It offers a chance to *do* something toward preparing our country against a foreign invasion. Nobody knows there is going to be a foreign invasion, but nobody knows there isn't. Our national means of defense are, at best, inadequate. They should at least be made readily available.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

WANTED MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.**

WISH to get in touch with a young married couple of good character to accompany myself and wife on an auto trip through the U. S. and Canada. Will furnish automobile and pay my share of expenses or more if necessary, but would expect some help. By utilizing weather conditions in different parts of the country we can so arrange our trip as to take advantage of tents and outdoor living a greater portion of the time. The writer has hunted and traveled for the past ten years from the Yukon to the Gulf and will guarantee interesting experiences. The trip will not require much money. We require and will furnish references as well as photograph which will be returned. Write all particulars and enclose photo in first letter. Our ages are 27 and 23.—Address W No. 273.

I HAVE traveled through Australia, India, Ceylon, Egypt, Japan, China and South Africa, etc., and have come to the conclusion that the best place to get money is in Latin South America, preferably Argentine.

I should like to meet a live man anxious to make a change. I have some land there, and between times we could add to our income by trading and hunting.—Address H. B. MACDONALD, 155 Bleury St., Montreal, Can.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

TWO or three young men under the age of 25. Must not be over 5 ft. 6 in., must be able to take care of themselves, stick to friends in a tight place and must not drink. A bicycle will come in handy. Prefer young men who have been in the Army or Navy with any kind of discharge. Have served in both branches myself.—Address W. H. BRYANT, Takoma Park, D. C.

PARTNER wanted with about two hundred dollars to go with me into the Florida everglades after gigantic alligator which I saw but was unable to capture owing to lack of the necessary tackle and help. Am an old 'gator hunter and taxidermist by trade and know exactly what I am talking about. This one is positively not one inch short of thirty-five feet and would very probably measure forty—almost twice as long as any now in captivity or that I have ever seen wild. As he would be worth many times as much alive as dead I did not shoot him although I could easily have done so. I know where his hole is and as old alligators never go far from their lairs he will easily be found again.—Address W. No. 278. Care *Adventure*.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

REGULAR fellow who believes with me:

"To give room for wandering is it
That the world was made so wide."

25 to 30, a good old head, who doesn't think the world owes him a living and has been out after it, to pal with me on a drift through the best of God's outdoors, the Sierras of California. The '49ers had their share, but there is prospecting, land and timber, fishing, hunting and deep breaths of pure wildness. The expense is small.—Address W. F. BAYLING, San Bernardino, Cal.

PARTNER to make trip over Lincoln Highway from New York City to San Francisco with a team of horses and wagon, selling or advertising goods, or both. About $200 necessary. Everything on equal shares.—Address FERDINAND HOFFMAN, 4715 Sixth Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Digitized by Google

LOST TRAILS

NOTE.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

PETERSON, WILLIAM (Pete); Watson, Will; Ahl, Bill; English, "Jess"; Vose, Jack; Seay Clif; Rooney, Bill; Fry, Joe; Baldwin, "Baldy"; Chapman; Kennedy; Molleter; Benner; McKinney; Tyson; Keinricks; Carlysle; Bill; Knode; Appleton; Wilkes; Butler; Davis; Vanlemberg; Burnham; Jenkins; Rice; Bergin; Sullivan; Weinell; Armstrong; Shay; Shendel, and other knights of the "Big Stick," who worked with me for the W. E. Company in Bangor, Me., after the fire, April 30, 1911.—Address R. S. WILLIAMS, 38 Allyn Street, Hartford, Conn.

COOK, ELLIOTT, nephew, thought to have enlisted in French army under name of George Coburn. Also goes with man named Bill Kennedy. 24 yrs., 6 ft., blue eyes, light reddish hair. Home is 336 W. 96th St., when in New York. Left Porto Limon some time in August en route for France.—Address JESSIE MONTGOMERY FISK, 507 Carnegie Hall, New York City.

BROWN, FRED A. and Mary Brown. Isabel and Willie are longing to hear from you. If you should not wish us to know your whereabouts, please send us your pictures. We care nothing about the past and should love to see our own dear father and mother or to know tney are living and to tell them that they have two little granddaughters, Nellie and Isabel Brown. Please let us hear from you.—Address ISABEL BROWN, R. F. D. No. 4, Box 1330, Fullerton, Cal.

MASSEY-LAWLESS, FRANK H. J. K. Sailed from San Francisco on S. S. "Moana" for Sydney about Oct. 26, 1899. Last heard from Melbourne, Dec. 1899. Short and slight; brown hair and eyes; English in appearance and manner. Had business office at Auckland, N. Z., at that time, but was always roving.—Address CHARLES J. WEATHERBY, 1333 Grove St., San Francisco, Cal.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

INFORMATION as to who my people are will be greatly appreciated. I was placed in the International Orphan's Home, Chicago, Ill., in 1895. My name was Edith Ethel Brauer or Brower. On Dec. 9, 1895, I was adopted by A. McMaster and wife of Hopkins, Mo. Elizabeth McElroy was nurse who took me to Hopkins, Mo. I will be 20 yrs. old October 12th.—Address VIOLET MCMASTER, Robertsdale, Ala.

LLOYD, EDMUND and Box, John and George, schoolmates of John George Raymond Fincham at Mr Crampton's school, Kew, England. Any information regarding them or J. G. R. Fincham, will be appreciated by his wife.—Address MRS. J. G. R. FINCHAM, 19 Bond St., Dundas, Ont., Can.

ASHER, ORLIE; brother. Indiana boy, 20 yrs. old; dark curly hair; 5 ft. 5 in.; 165 lbs. Worked Cadillac automobile shops, Detroit, Mich., 1911 and 1912. Last heard of New London, Ont., Oct. 15, 1912.—Address JOE M. ASHER, care of Mansfield Eng. Co., Sailor's Rest., Tenn.

NICHOLS, SAMUEL R., inventor and traveler. Last seen in Washington, D. C. Left there Spring of 1914 for Ft. Worth, Texas. Now rumored in Argentine Republic. Important news for him.—Address L. N. GILLIS, Victor Bldg., Washington, D. C.

MCINTOSH, JAMES W., brother. Harness maker. Last seen Victoria, B. C., 1898. Heard he was in Helo, Honolulu 1900. Information wanted, whether living or dead.—Address MRS. EMMA ANDERSON, 714 Queens Ave., Victoria, B. C., Can.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

MORRISEY, JOHN, our brother. Left Ottawa, Ont., Can., about 35 yrs. ago for the States. His mother's maiden name is Julia Dilloin. Had two brothers William and Michael. Father's name is John.—Address KATHERINE AND ELIZABETH MORRISEY, 580 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, Mass.

GRACE, E. LESLIE, French, 28 or 29 years; 5 ft. 7 in.; both arms and left hand tattooed, born Durham, Nata Vinong, S. Africa. Enlistment in Queens Own Sottish Borders, Hospital Corps. If in States probably working in some hospital. Last heard from just after the battle of Little's Ranch, Lower California; Mexico, with Stanley.—Address C. C. LEIGH, Gen. Del., San Francisco, Cal. Canadian papers please copy.

MAZURETTE, ALFRED, P., brother. Last heard of Montreal, 1892. French; 50 years; brown eyes; 170 lbs.; medium height. Born St. Rose, Canada. Often in St. Johns, N. B. Kept Pickwick Hotel in Montreal.—Address MRS. CELIA SKINNER, 3019 Kenwood, Indianapolis, Ind.

ALLEN, ROBERT. Former home Bucyrus, Ohio. 23 yrs.; dark; union barber by trade. Went West 1910. Last heard of Hamilton City, Cal., thinking of going to Los Angeles. Have very important news for him.—Address F. E. DERRINGER, Box C, Fulton, Mo.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

LEACH, O. L. (Slim), write your sister. I got inquiry through Neil Bartlett about you. Received your letter from Tulsa, Okla. I have your B. R. T. receipts for January and February, but don't know where to send them.—Address D. W. IRBY, Box 211, Assiniboia, Sask., Can.

BRUE, CHARLIE (White), 29 yrs.; 5 ft. 8 in.; 165 lbs.; light brown hair; brown eyes. Last heard from Milner, Idaho, June, 1910. Was with Boyd Construction Company, railroad work. Left there for Oregon.—Address T. A. BRUE, Litchfield, Ill. Canadian papers please copy.

WRIGHT, JAMES WILLIAM, left Manchester, England, 16 years ago for China; rumored that he went to Japan. 58 yrs. old; 5 ft. 11 in.; fair; stout build. Five pounds reward for present address or proof of death.—Address PHILIP E. WRIGHT, care of Messrs. Vickerstaffer & Marves, Grovenser Lane, Hobson St., Auckland, N. Z.

KING, FRANK M. 30 yrs. old; light complexion; 140 lbs.; blind right eye; strictly temperate; speaks Spanish fluently and is an all-around mechanic. Last seen Winnfield, La., Summer, 1908.—Address HOMER F. SHIVERS, 701 South F St., Hugo, Okla.

WILEY, ELSWORTH, missing since Nov. 13, 1914. Last seen Bartlest Alley, San Francisco. Information generously rewarded.—Address LUCIUS HICKS, 2700 Bancroft Ave., Berkeley, Cal.

GALLOWAY, JAMES R. and Moyer, Ted, who worked with me on Southern Pacific 1912.—Address J. W. ROBERTSON, 912 W. Lynn, Austin, Texas.

RIMER, J. D., soldier in 4th Mo. Vol. 1898. Later was in South America and Panama. Painter by trade. Last heard of Grafton, Cal., 1913.—Address GEORGE H. MECK, 3317 Allen Ave., Sacramento, Cal.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

TRAUHAUF, HAROLD, A., son, discharged from Monterey, Cal., July or August, 1914. Last heard from Rosedale, Cal. 6 ft., blue eyes, and light brown hair.—Address MRS. W. WAID, 769 Montclair Avenue, Detroit, Mich.

GOTTLIEB, EDWARD, son, electrician. Disappeared December, 1908. 38 yrs.; 145 lbs.; 5¼ ft.—Address MRS. D. GOTTLIEB, 4403 Page Bldg., St. Louis, Missouri. Canadian and European papers please copy.

BOZAN, R. W. Information wanted as to present address. Goes by name of R. W. Pearson. Member of the Waiters or Stewards Union. Last heard of was working in Chicago.—Address E. M. SMALLWOOD, care of H. C. Baker, 1107 Dart St., Houston, Tex.

MAPLES, CLEMM., machinist. Known around Memphis, Tenn., as "Battling Maples." Came from McComo, Miss. We were together 1913, diving in Havana Harbor.—Address J. C. CHRISTMOS, Raton, New Mexico.

Digitized by Google

WIXSON, JOE B., brother. Last seen Ft. Worth, Texas. About 8 yrs. old when last heard from; 32 now.—Address GEORGE W. WIXSON, Polytechnic, Texas.

WASHBURN, BERT, Bostonian. Last heard of Chicago. His friend, Seymour, who worked with him in Bronx, N. Y. Summer, 1913, would be very glad to hear from him.—Address SEYMOUR, care of *Adventure*.

WINGS, CLAUD C. Private in Co. C, 9th Inf., and reported missing after massacre at Balangiga, Samar. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address H. G. WINGS, Hotel Cranfod, Jasper, Ala.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

FUTCHISON, GEORGE, college mate, London University, of John George Raymond Fincham. Information wanted by his wife.—Address MRS. J. G. R. FINCHAM, 19 Bond Street, Dundas, Ont., Can.

CORPORAL discharged Sept. 2, 1912, from Troop F, 13th Cavalry, please send address to old F troop man discharged Oct. 20, 1910.—Address JAMES RENEHAM, 764 Howard Ave., Bridgeport, Conn.

ALICE KNOWLES, whaler out of 'Frisco, Nov., 1906. Shipmates, especially green hands: Miller of Los Angeles, Meyers of Salida, Colo., Williams of New Orleans.—Address WALTER BAYLING, San Bernardino, Cal.

HUGHES, HENRY. Wife's maiden name Melinda Cross, of New Brunswick, Canada. Sons or daughters of above.—Address ADRIAN CROSS, St. George, N. B., Can.

CODDINGTON, WILLIAM. 17 yrs. old; 5 ft. 9½ in.; light hair; light blue eyes. Left home about 7 months ago with no word to his parents.—Address GEORGE CODDINGTON, 945 Lorimer St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

SNYDER, BILL, concrete inspector on Long Key Viaduct, Florida Keys, 1906 and '07. Formerly of Wellesley Hills, Mass.—Address E. A. BORHEK, 508 Goepp St., Bethlehem, Pa.

RYAN, CHARLES, last heard from Meacham, Ore. Worked for Gaynor's Construction Co. on O. R. R. N. Co.—Address L. L. OLIVER, 109 Lasalle Road, Verdun, Montreal, Can.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BAKER, HOWARD E., formerly member 4th Inf. Co. A. Probably in service or around Omaha, Nebr.—Address GEORGE D. GROENEMAN, care of Laclede Rooms, Twin Falls, Idaho.

FRED, Love from home, everything O. K.—HATTIE.

WILSON, SADIE, mother, last heard of Duluth, Minn., 1910.—Address J. L. WILSON, 1436 Lakeshore Ave., Los Angeles, Cal.

SPANG, CHESTER. Left Freeville, N. Y., with me, May, 1911. Think he joined Navy in Buffalo, N. Y. —PAUL H. JONES, 5515 San Pedro St., Los Angeles, Cal.

MACPHERSON, J. W., old friend, last known Goldfield, Nevada; left there for San Francisco.—Address F. M. HANKEY, Independence, Inyo Co., Cal.

FOSTER, JOHN FRANK, wrote to sister July 31, 1871, from New York City, saying he was to sail on some vessel, name and destination unknown; that was the last heard from him.—Address LOUIS N. BANDOIN, Fairhaven, Mass.

RICHARD, CHARLIE E., last heard from Cardiff, Wales. He left Galveston, Texas, April, 1914.—Address PERRON F. HUDSON, Covington, Va.

SEERY. Want to hear from any reader by that name for purpose of finding out how many there are in United States and Canada, and to establish family connections.—Address J. P. SEERY, Box 174, Woodsville, N. H.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SHEA, TIMOTHY or "Tim." Last heard from 1911, at Los Angeles, Cal.—Address DENNIS SHEA, R. F. D. No. 2, Waitsburg, Wash.

ST. CLAIR, FRED, last heard of Sept. 9, 1913, North Yakima, Washington.—Address L. T. No. 274.

RYAN, BILLY. With me 1908 at Murray, Idaho.—Address JIM ERRICSON, Poteau, Okla.

PRINCE, BEN, last seen Memphis, Tenn. Please write your old friend TUBY, care of *Adventure*.

THE following have been inquired for in "Lost Trails." They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

A—C. ADAMS, Eddie, signwriter; Allen, Robert, barber; Alston, William E.; Alt, W. D. (Billy); Arhens, Helen Breckenridge; Armbruster, Joseph Anthony; Arrington, Tommy; Bagley, Thomas H.; Baker, Mrs. Maude, Dallas, 1900; Barnes, William Henry; Barrette, Miss Cora Mabel; Beaton, A. W.; Bedell, Percy John; Bennett, Ross; Bens, Joseph, called "Jupp"; Benson, Harry, Mansfield Center, Conn.; Bergholen, Fred; Bishop, Charles C.; Black, Beb, alias "Big Ben", cattleman; Blackham, N. A.; Blankman, Charles H., Buffalo, N. Y.; Boatswain's Mate Holyoke, Seymour Relief Expedition; Bolton, Leonard; Bossard, Raymond C.; Bradford, Frank William, N. Yakima, Wash.; Bradley, Alonzo; Brantley, John William; Breed, Riley H., Winnipeg, 1909; Brice, M. E.; Brooks, Al. H., rancher, Canada; Brown, Arthur, Oklahoma City; Brown, Edward G., "The Dalles Country," Oregon; Brown, James; Brush, Don, Detroit, Mich.; Burhans, Burton L.; Burke, Edgar, in Hamburg 1912-13; Burns, William, tailor of Dubuque; Burns, William, in Eldorado, 1904; Butterbaugh, Christian M.; Byers, R. C.; Carr, David H.; Carrico, Ralph; Case, John; Child, George, Australia 1882; Christensen, A. G., South America; Coates, John F.; Cockrill, Arthur R.; Coiner, Carl; Cole, Egbert L.; Comford, James, Lepanto, Ark.; Comstock, Orns H.; Connelly, Jim, Congo district Africa, 1888 and '89; Cooke, Albert, Combe Martine, Devonshire, England; Cook, William, Jolo, 1903-'04; Cooper, J. Howard; Cory, Willis (Red, Kentuck, or Wins Golden), Philippines, Tex., Calif.; Cotler, William T., Lake Fisher, 1890; Cox, John Arthur, Jacksonville, Fla.; Crane, Roland Henry; Craft, James M., known by name of Taylor; Crawford, John and Lee; Crockett, Louis Henry; Crompton, James, Leeds, Mass.; Cronkhite, N. I. W.; Crosby, Si; Cross, James Kenneth; Cross, Frederick, Dayton, Ohio; Culp, Simon P.; Culver, Billy; Cunningham, Patrick, Michael and James; Cuyler, Alston O.

D—I. Dalziel, James, bark *Socotra;* Davenport, James, native of Mississippi; Davenport, Phil; Davidman, Max; Davis, James P., Harper, Kansas, 1901; Davis, Warren; Davies, "Guy"; Davis, E. L., formerly of Winnipeg; Day, Stanley; Deckard, Ed (Wessel); Deny Brothers; Dies, Arthur W.; Digel, Julius C.; Drennan, John Matthew; Dobbert, Ed. "Kid"; Dorrity or Dougherty, John; Douglas, Foster W. "Dong"; Downy, Stephen; Dowst, Arthur A.; DuGuay, William; Duncan, George R.; Dwight, L. H., Hospital Corps, Philippines, 1900; Eckles, Warren; Ellingsen, Frithjof; Ellis, Harry; Elmsie, Donald E.; Ensign, W. H.; Englehart, Adrian; Engesser, Conrad A.; Ewell, Leighton; Fairfax, Donald C.; Farnsley, A. A.; Fedoroski, Karol; Fields, Harry R. Flores, Jose Timoleon; Floyd, Harry; Foley, Mike L.; Foy, George Havelock Willing; Francis, Henry, *Trenton*, Samoa; Frager, Clifford, Foraker, Okla.; Fullmer, Frank F.; Gallup, Cordia, known as Leon Burt; Gebbs, or Gibbs, Rebel junta courier, Santa Rosalia; Gilbertson, Joseph, left Edinburg, Scotland, March 26, 1893; Gillespie, Boe W.; Gillespie, Gene "Manhattan"; Gogg, Ikey; Goldstein, S. A., Syracuse, N. Y.; Goodwin, James Alexander; Gordan, John; Graham, Charles A., left Toronto, August, 1913; Graham, Dan, Superior, Wis.; Greenwood, Charles; Growman, Harry; Gulliver, Iquique, '98; Hall, Charles T.; Hamilton, Charles; Hammerschmidt, Raimund; Harumond, Paul C.; Hardy, John; Harson, William; Hart, Jack; Haskinson, Gordon (English); Hayes, "Bob"; Hayman, Charles Fisher; Heckenhauer, Karl H.; Hellman, H. H.; Hess, Erskine (Erk); Hiatt, Claud, brother of; Hinckley, Royand Harry; Hiyden, Charles; Hoffman, S. G., cook, Holdenville, Okla.; Hoffman, Clint, stowaway, *Closeburn;* Holbrook, Dis, civil engineer; Holbrook, Elmer H., late of Marine Corps; Holden, Willis A.; Hollis, Bach; Howlette, H. J., called Pete; Huffman, J. L.; Hully, Harry H.; Ingram, Robert W.; Irvin, Howard, on *Maitai*, '11.

J—N. JACKSON, CLIFFORD P., Havana, Cuba; Jasper, Key West, Mexico; Jay, Wilburn, Madero, Foreign Legion; Jefferson, Carl; Jenkins, Earl; Jewell, George H.; Jessup, Theodore V.; Johnson, Brandy; Jones, William H., Los Angeles, Cal.; Kelly, Charles, with Carnival Show, Argenta, Ark., 1912; Kemp, driver in Oakland; Kennedy, George F., Marcus, Wash.; Kernohan, Frank; Kinzman, Martin; Koynors, C. H. (Spud); Knight, Charles; Spokane, Wash.; Knudsen, Fred, *Red Rock, Balmoral;* Lane, Martin, U. S. A., Klondike; Lassen, Capt. Lorenz; Lavell, Prof. Cecil F.; Lawler, Slim; Law, Gordon; Lear, John, Everett, Wash.; Lee, John R., Amsterdam, N. Y.; Leigh, T. G.; Leslie, Blayney; Levy, Samuel; Le Vonde, William; Lewis, Harrison H.; Lighthowler, George W.; Lindsay, Charles; Litchfield, H.; Lockard, Harry; Loeber, Charles; Lovett, Charles, seaman; Luecke, J. F.; Luscumb, Ben; Lyons, William C.; McArthur, William, piper in 42d Black Watch Highlanders; McBride, Douglas, Ind., Ohio, Mich.; McCarthy, Dan, rigger on Victoria Falls Bridge.

Digitized by Google

Martel, Dick, Hemosileo; Maynell, Charles; Meade, Dan, San Francisco, '07; Meek, Harold C., Denver, Colo., '07; Megie, Benjamin F., South America or South Africa; Meisel, John; Meissner, Pete, Grajervo; Mendoza, Richarde; Mentusha, Big; Merle, Eugene; Meyrick, Lieut. Archibald, Prince of Wales's Light Horse, Boer War; Miller, Frank; Miller, Henry Chapin, Warrenburg, Mo., 1874; Miller, William, electrician; Moleres, Edward; Moreland, John L., Gila Bend, Ariz., 1912; Morgan, William Hare, Boulder, Wyo.; Moriarty, John F., Madero Foreign Legion; Morine, Capt. C. D.; Morris, Thomas George Dixon; Morrow, Joseph, Toledo, Ohio; Moulder, Joe; Mullen, Thomas, Buffalo, N. Y.; Murray, Michael, late of Trale, Ireland; Nelson, Fred; Nicholson, Harry A. or Nickerson; Niell, H. (Nielson); Nolan, Michael, born in Kilkenny; Nugent, Richard Thomas; Nylander, C. W., left Sweden, 1893, Cooperstown, N. D., 14 years ago.

O—R. O'BRIEN, WILLIAM F., carriage maker, Oakland, Cal.; O'Callaghan, Dennis Charles; O'Flaherty, Joseph H., lived at Woodland and Sacramento, Cal.; Ogden, known as "Tex" or "Two Bar Slim"; Olsen, Abbey and Beaver, Fred; Orpen, William M.; Owen, Robert; Owen, Allan H.; Paige, Frederick; Parker, Ross, Chicago, 1907-'08; Parker, Capt. F. T.; Parker, Jess, cowpuncher; Pavilla, Jack, of "Jackly Wonders"; Penney, J. C., left Vallejo, Cal., March 3, 1914; Pennock, Dr. Walker, C.; Peralto, Jose L.; Pettit, James R.; Phillpot, Shirley M.; Pittenger, Fred; Pogoda, Albert; Raansvaal, Isaac, Co. I., 9th U. S. I.; Rae, Clarence, P. J. R.; Raeder, Edward J.; Radcliffe, Col. John (Jack) Stanley; Ray, Carol D., Pawhuska, Okla., 1913; Reeves, Paul V., Manilla, P. I., January, 1900; Reitmeier, Charley; Reynolds, William, Sgt. at Tucuran, 1902-'04; Reed, Harry F., El Reno, Okla., 1912; Rhode, Gust, left Grant Co., Herman, Minn., about 11 years ago; Rice, Andrew, '49er, Bath Co., Ky.; Rice, Mark (Serrott); Rice, Charles B., Kansas City; Richardson, Frank Eply; Rickard, Mrs. Lauretta; Rivers, Major Don. C. A.; Roach, Henry, Tewksbury, Mass., 1868; Roberts, Joe, Chicago, Ill.; Robertson, Charlie, mulatto; Robertson, Harry G., Customs, Manila; Rogers, Pete, of Manchester; Rogerson, William L.; Russell, Charles B., Hospital Corps.

S—Z. SABIN, CARL AND STEELE, Clayton, late of the United States Navy; Sarries, James H.; Sawyer, Walter, Beaumont or Orange, Texas, 1913; Schaeffer, Charlie, Sonora; Scheidell, John; Schener, Nick, Texas, 1899; Scisco, Leon D.; Scott, Fred, once Pennsylvania newspaper man; Seaman, Charles Lovett; Seigel, "Dutch"; Servin, Martin; Shannon, James and William; Shaw, William C.; Shepherd, Richard L., Vancouver and Toronto; Shea, W. A., Cement, near San Francisco, Cal.; Sherwood, Dote (Golden); Sherwood, F. A.; Smith, F. E., *Olympia* at Manila; Sipes, Hubert E., Rome, Italy; Smith, Francis Basil, No. 17 Troop, South African Constabulary; Smith, Oscar, Australian; Smith, William McK., Portland, Ore., Dec., 1914; Smith, William Chalmers, Mexico; Snead, Jack; Snider, M. E., Waco or Corpus Christi, Texas; Snowberger, Kirk R.; Spiering, August Frederick Wm.; Stearns, Herman; Stevens, Mrs. J. S., Brookville, Mass.; Stewart, E. B.; Stewart, W. J. (Bill); Stockton, Walter; Stout, E.; Stokes, P. A., Hilo, Honolulu, 1911, and Daley, Walter, Tampico, Mex., 1912; "Struthers"; Sullivan, Frank, Temora, N. S. W., Australia; Sutherland, Charlie, once Bechuanaland police; Sutton, Edward Hepper; Sweidert, "Dutchy"; Sykes, Grover C.; Taylor, James C. and wife, Margaret Dillon Taylor, left Roxbury, Mass., for Cal.; Thomson, Roscoe; Thomson, Corp. John, 2d Canadian Mounted Rifles, Boer War; Thurber, T. T. (Tom); Tice, Wm. G.; Timmanus, Frank E.; Treasdale, A. (Weasel); Travis, Joe; Treat, Roy M.; Troughton, J. J.; Turner, Charles N., Monterey, Mex.; Turnnard, Frank Albert; Van Auker, Ceasar; Van Wagoner, "Dutch"; Vanderdasson, Jim; Wagner, Rudolph (Ruddy) Newark, N. J.; Walker, Charles T.; Weiner, Oscar; Whittaker, Forrest Bennett; Wiley, Miles G.; Will, John Andrew, West 18th St., N. Y.; Williams, Elizabeth Matilda; Wilson, Col. Robert B.; Wilson, Charles Livingston; Willbern, Walter P.; Williams, Babe; Willis, A. Holden; Winsman, Harry; Wise, Johnny, Yaqui Indian country, Mexico; Wooler, Dick, West Indies, 1906; Young, Dale L., left Washington, D. C., Aug. 12, 1914.

MISCELLANEOUS:—Comrades, Co. G, 41st Inf., and Capt. Graves's Co., 20th Inf.; Frazier, John, Frazier, Marion, Garrett, William, Frazier, Mr. (brothers, father and sister); members of Stanley-Pryce & Masbys outfits in Lower Cal., 1910 and 1911; Shipmates on Hamburg-American line, tramp *Sornia*, New York to Frontera, Mexico, June 2 to 21, 1913; A. J. write mother and Adele; Comrades who served in the 34th Inf., Co. B, in Philippines, 1899; Jimmy Brew, Jess Howard, Little Mack, and George Padgett, who were in Chihuahua, Mexico, in 1907; Veterinary surgeon, Indianapolis, Crowley, La.; Members of Madero's Foreign Legion during 1911; Urita write Charles U. Cummings; Goff or Goef, last name unknown; All members of Co. M.—1—2; Any one who worked J. F. Marshall's and John Bruggar's paper-box shops; Comrades, Co. G, 5th Inf., in Central and Western States, Rampby, Will F., F. Balance or Harry Balance; Members of K Co., of the 18th Inf., 1900 to 1902; "Spade Tail" Joe Bennett, George Ligars, "Chicken" Gardner or any of the bunch of the 18th U. S. Inf. on Panay Island in '99 or 1900, also Sergt. Behi, 18th Inf.; Will, mail at Sydney; Clare, William, Steurtzel, Count, and Leach, "Doc"; Any one 4th Texas Vol. Inf. in Spanish War; Boer comrades of John Bussanich at Ladysmith, and along Tugela, also Murray, John, Morrows, Tom, McTigh, James; Ryan, Jack; Bonavita, friends of Capt. Jack; Boys in Army, Navy or Marine Corps in the China Relief Expedition of 1900 and 1901; Brook, heirs of Glen; Comrades on *Culzean*, 1875-9, or gunboat *Bulldog*, also Troop K, 6th U. S. Cav., Apache campaigns, 1881-6; Comrades in Co. E, 20th U. S. Inf., Troop E, 7th U. S. Cav.; DuBois, Percy M., Plum, R. R.; Enscoe, Joe, Carruthers, Charles, Selig, Lester, Hogan, Thomas L., Osbourne, Andy—Once of *Evening Star*; Hospital Corps, 23d U. S. Inf., 40th U. S. V.; J. L. F.; Men with U. S. forces during the China Relief Expedition of 1900; Nelda, Miss Winniefred, Wilson, Francis and their father of the Mexican Central R. R. Company; Nesbitt, Capt., V. C., and other comrades of M. M. Marsden; O'Connor, A. S., Ross, Bob, Van Damme, Jimmie, Kufeke, Hans, Griffiths, Jack, Harries, Julian, Gardiner, Jack—once E and C Troops, B. S. A. P.; Old shipmates British bark *Lyderhorn;* Tressider, Percy, comrades of "Lintic" O'Sea, "El Rayo," comrades of; Van Leue, comrades of Capt. F. E.; Brother last seen in 1909 write to Stephen Epp; Mrs. Wm. Ross, orphan, inquiring about herself; Don; Reckless where are you; Sands, Gen. Cliff, or members of proposed expedition, Col. C. A. Morine, W. E. Packard, W. E. Hammond, S. M. Clark, R. F. Stoddard.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

The following stories are scheduled for the August issue of *Adventure*, out July 3d.

THE RED ALPHABET A Novel — ***Raymond Barrett***

A fight between organized crime and the law.

THE WINDS OF THE WORLD — ***Talbot Mundy***

The second instalment of this strong tale of India.

THE BAD SAMARITAN Novelette — ***Arthur D. Howden Smith***

Concerning the crew of a British tramp steamer, and a daring German sea-raider.

DOWN BY THE RIO GRANDE — ***J. Allan Dunn***

Another adventure of *Sandy Bourke*.

THE KALZAS HOODOO — ***Samuel Alexander White***

Sark and *Bassett* suddenly desire to own the earth, so they hunt the mother-lode.

THE MOODS OF WAR. An Article — ***George Albert Schreiner***

Being sketches from a Boer officer's notebook.

KITE DICKINSON—NON-COMBATANT — ***Gordon McCreagh***

A Yankee stirs the Younghusband Tibet Expedition by his nerve and his "punch."

A CASE OF ZINC — ***Henry Oyen***

A rural policeman "shows up" some city detectives.

PROVIDENCE AND THE GREEN APPLES — ***Frank W. Stanton and Stephen Allen Reynolds***

A tense story of railroading.

THE ROLLING STONE GOES MOSS GATHERING — ***Ross Ellis***

Big business is jolted by two scrappy young men.

BROWN — ***Mayn Clew Garnett***

The last voyage of a deep-sea man-driver.

Digitized by Google

Adventure

Wants Representatives

Ambitious men who will look after our subscription interests in their neighborhood.

They can earn from $25.00 to $250.00 per month in their spare time.

The work is very simple, very pleasant. It will not conflict with your present duties. An hour or so a week—whatever you can conveniently spare—is all that is needed, although, of course, the more time you put in the more you earn.

Better still, no previous experience, no special training, is necessary to succeed. We will furnish full equipment and instructions free. No investment is needed.

As our local representative you will collect renewal orders from those whose subscriptions expire, and also forward as many new orders as you can for our publications.

Drop us a line today and let us show you how easily you can add $25.00 to $250.00 each month to your income.

Adventure

Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York

Digitized by Google

The Snarl of Waking Asia

"If to write truthfully about the possibility of war with Japan one has to write dangerously, that would seem reason enough for doing it."—*Garet Garrett.*

Mr. Garrett writes about Japan. His article is truthful. It is comprehensive. It is—well, the things it discusses threaten to be more vital to the future of this country than any settlement involved in the present great European War.

Garet Garrett

pictures Japan, and the Japanese, to-day. Mr. Garrett knows his subject. He knows how strongly the Japanese feel—why they feel strongly. He knows how important it is for this country to act—*and to act at once!* That is why this present time, serious as it is with hair-trigger possibilities, is the right time for him to deliver his message to the American people.

Every thinking man and woman in this country should read Garet Garrett's article.

Owen Johnson

has written a big novel of the year in *"Making Money."* Four young Yale men come to New York to seek Fortune. What they do to New York! What New York does to them! It is more dramatic than *"The Salamander,"* more gripping than *"Stover At Yale"*—by long odds the greatest novel this brilliant young American has written yet.

Ernest Poole

comes fresh from the German trenches with a wholly new conception of war. He had thought war brutal, debasing, bestial. But he found he knew little or nothing about it. He found that —well, what he found makes *"The Face of My Enemy"* one of the best war articles we have seen. Be sure to read it.

Joseph C. Lincoln

Laughter! and more laughter! *"The Guest from Samaria"* is delicious. Never was Joseph C. Lincoln funnier. You remember *"Captain Eri"*? and *"The Woman-Haters"*? A real treat is in store for you here.

The Dollar Sign In Baseball

Irving Sanborn of the Chicago *Tribune* is one of the best-known sporting writers in the United States. Baseball—what is wrong with it? War? Federal League? Hard Times? Nothing of the sort. The magnates themselves are to blame!! Sanborn will open your eyes to the real facts.

Everybody's MAGAZINE

Digitized by Google